MONICA'S CHOICE

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[Frontispiece: "THE YOUNG CLERGYMAN CLIMBED CAREFULLY BUT QUICKLY DOWN TO THEM" (missing from book)]

MONICA'S CHOICE

BY

FLORA E. BERRY

AUTHOR OF
"NETA LYALL," "IN SMALL CORNERS," ETC.

WITH SIX ILLUSTRATIONS

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MONICA'S CHOICE.

CHAPTER I.

"I WISH CONRAD HAD NEVER LEFT HER WITH ME!"

"Tell Miss Monica I wish her to come to me *at once*, Barnes."

The door closed silently after the retreating maid, and Mrs. Beauchamp sighed wearily. How often, lately, she had been obliged to send some such message to her wilful young granddaughter, and, how many more times would she have the same thing to do? Her aristocratic features wore a perturbed expression, as her slender fingers toyed mechanically with the many rings on her left hand; so great a responsibility was her only grandchild.

"I am sure I wish Conrad had never left her with me," she mused; "and yet there seemed no other solution of the difficulty when the regiment was ordered out to Simla. It was impossible, of course, to take her with him, and poor Helen was so opposed to boarding-schools. But it has certainly been a mistake having her here. Such an unruly, passionate nature as Monica's needs very careful handling, and not one of these governesses has had the tact to manage her. I'm sure I don't know what to do about her."

Mrs. Beauchamp's ruminations were cut short by the abrupt entrance of a girl of fifteen, tall, and with a haughty mien, but possessing a face which denoted much character, albeit it wore an unpleasant scowl at the present moment. Pushing the door to behind her with no gentle hand, so that it slammed violently, causing a jingling among the pretty knick-knacks with which the handsome drawing-room was lavishly ornamented, Monica Beauchamp stood before her grandmother, like a young lioness at bay.

"Barnes told me that you had sent for me, grand-mamma."

With a visible shudder at the noise made by the slamming door, Mrs. Beauchamp sat erect, and spoke with much annoyance, as she gave the delinquent an aggrieved look over her gold-rimmed pince-nez.

"Really, Monica----" she began, in severe tones, but she was interrupted.

"Sorry," exclaimed her granddaughter, nonchalantly. "I didn't mean to hurt your feelings, but doors always seem to slip out of my fingers. What did you want me for, grandmamma? Would you mind being quick, because I'm in a great hurry?"

Even insubordinate Monica quailed before the expressions which flitted across the old lady's features--amazement, anger, and finally scorn.

"I am simply *astounded* at your rudeness, Monica," she said, sternly. "How you can possibly allow yourself to speak to me in such a manner, I cannot imagine. It is very evident that you are no Beauchamp."

The scorn expressed in her grandmother's tones acted in the same way as a touch of the whip about the ears of a thoroughbred mare. She started, and tears of wounded pride welled up in her flashing hazel eyes, but they were quickly forced back.

"I *am* a Beauchamp!" she cried, her lips quivering with anger, and her head thrown back. "Every one says I am my father over again."

"So you may be, in looks, Monica, but he would never have dreamed of addressing me in the manner you did just now."

"Well, perhaps he wasn't aggravated like I am. Miss Thompson is enough to provoke a saint," she added, *sotto voce*, with a furtive glance at the old lady's face.

But Mrs. Beauchamp took no notice of it; indeed, it is doubtful if she heard the remark, so engrossed was she in deciding how best to deliver the lecture she had undertaken to give Monica. A startled exclamation from her grandchild, who had been moodily staring out of one of the French windows, which overlooked a large sweep of the carriage drive, effectually roused her.

"Oh! now he's gone; I do call it too bad!"

"What do you mean, Monica?" queried the old lady, rising from her chair and following the direction of Monica's glance.

"Who has gone?"

"Why, Tom. The stable-boy, you know, grand-mamma," she added, as Mrs. Beauchamp looked incredulous. "I was in the yard when you sent for me, and he was telling me about the jolliest little wire-haired terrier his father wants to sell, and I----"

"Monica, how many times have I told you I will not allow you to frequent the stable-yard? I am sure it is there that you pick up all the vulgar expressions you are so continually using. I begin to think Miss Thompson is right in saying you are no lady."

"Bother Miss Thompson!" cried Monica, now thoroughly angry, and losing all control of her words; "she's a sly old cat, that's what she is, spying round after me all day long. It's the only bit of fun I get, when I----"

"Be quiet, Monica, and listen to me," said her grandmother, who was scarcely less angry, but who held herself in admirable check. "It is quite time that some one controlled you, and I have sent for you this afternoon to tell you that I am going to----"

"Send me away to boarding school?" interrupted Monica, her anger temporarily subsiding, for, of all things, she desired to go away to school, but it had always been tabooed. "Oh! grandmamma, *do*! I would really behave well there." And she seized one of the old lady's white hands impulsively in her warm, and decidedly dirty young fingers, while the girlish face quivered with excitement, until she looked a totally different being. But she was doomed to disappointment.

"Nothing of the kind, Monica," replied Mrs. Beauchamp coldly, and withdrawing her hand. She never responded to her granddaughter's advances, which probably accounted for the difficulty she had in dealing with her; for Monica had a warm heart hidden away somewhere, which no one but her father had ever reached. "I was going to say, when you so rudely interrupted me again, that as you have had four governesses within very little more than a year, who, one and all, have declared that you are unmanageable, and that it is an utter impossibility to teach you, I shall be obliged to seek some other mode of education for you."

Monica's face, which had fallen considerably at the beginning of her grandmother's speech, now brightened visibly.

"There is nothing else but boarding-school left," she said, with satisfaction. It was to this end that she had made the lives of her long-suffering instructresses unendurable by her tricks and general unruliness.

"You know perfectly well, Monica, that you will never go to a boarding-school," replied Mrs. Beauchamp.

"That was only a fad of mother's," said Monica, disdainfully. "Dad would never have forbidden it. He thought no end of Harrow, and I'm sure he would let me go to school if you told him what a bother the old governesses are."

"He knows what a trouble *you* are," said her grandmother sententiously, and her glance fell on a foreign letter lying on her escritoire near by, which Monica now noticed for the first time.

"Oh! have you heard from dad, grandmamma? Is there a letter for me?" she cried eagerly.

"Yes. I have heard from your father, and there is a letter for you," Mrs. Beauchamp repeated, slowly, but she did not reach out her hand for it.

Impetuous Monica was about to snatch it up, but her grandmother stayed her hand.

"Wait, Monica, until I have finished, and then you may take your letter to the schoolroom to read. For months I did not tell your father a word about your troublesome ways, but lately you have been so incorrigible that I was compelled

to let him know. And now this letter has come in reply to mine, and your father is grieved beyond expression. No doubt he will tell you the same in your letter; and he wishes me to consult Mr. Bertram, the lawyer, as to which school it will be best to send you to, immediately. But ... it will be a day-school. Now you may go."

Monica snatched up the letter handed to her without a word, and was gone. Mrs. Beauchamp breathed a sigh of relief, and rang the bell for tea; the letter and consequent interview with her unruly grandchild had tired her out.

Meanwhile Monica had fled to her own room, a perfect little paradise, containing all the things most dear to a young girl's heart. Everything in it, from the dainty bed to the little rocking-chair beside the open window, was blue; carpet, curtains, walls, all took the prevailing tint, and most girls of Monica's age would have revelled in such surroundings, and have taken a pride in having everything kept in spick-and-span order, in so charming a domain. But not so Monica; one of her worst failings was untidiness. The shoes which she had worn out of doors that morning, and which had been carelessly tossed in a corner, were making dirty little puddles on the blue and white linoleum: for she had been caught in a heavy April shower. Her hat and jacket had been tossed promiscuously on to the most convenient chair; one glove was lying on the bed, the other--well, as a matter of fact she had dropped that half-way home, but had not missed it yet; that would mean a fruitless hunt through drawers, all more or less in confusion, next time she went out. The comb and brush she had hastily used, to make herself sufficiently tidy to pass muster with her grandmother at the luncheon table, were still lying on the dainty little duchesse table, while the drawer which should have contained them was half open, disclosing a medley of all kinds.

These are only samples of "Miss Monica's muddles," as the long-suffering under-housemaid (whose duty it was to keep the young lady's room in order) called them. "I can't seem to keep things tidy nohow," she would confide to the kitchenmaid; "as soon as ever I get it straightened up of a morning, in she bounces, and begins a-topsy-turvying up of everything."

But Monica noticed none of these things; if the room had been in absolute chaos she would have been oblivious of it, while she held a thin sheet of foreign paper, covered with her father's writing, in her hand.

Pausing only to slip a tiny brass bolt into its place, in order to secure privacy, she flung herself into the little blue rocker, and tore open the envelope with eager fingers.

As she read her letter, a smile of pleasure hovered about her lips, for her father gave in his own racy style a description of a Hindu *mela* at which he had been present the day before; but soon her expression changed, for his next topic was very different. It was evident that he was deeply concerned about her behaviour

to her grandmother and governesses, and the thought of her fast growing up into a headstrong, self-willed young woman grieved him terribly. He spoke of the loving little girl to whom he had bid farewell only eighteen months before, and could scarcely imagine that in so short a time she should have become so changed; what would she be like when he returned to England, if she were allowed to follow her own way?

Monica's tears were slowly falling as she reached the last page. She began to realise, for the first time, that she was disappointing her father's hopes for his only and much-loved child, and although the knowledge was painful, it was very salutary. With eyes blinded with tears, so that the writing seemed blurred and indistinct, she read on to the end, and then as she saw the well-known signature, she bowed her proud young head on the broad window-ledge, and sobbed as if her heart would break.

"Oh! dad, my darling dad, if only you needn't have left me, I would have tried to be just what you wanted; but it's all so stiff and dull here, and I am so lonely without any friend." For several minutes she wept on unrestrainedly, and then a few lines in the letter recurred to her, and she looked at it once again. They ran thus--

"You see, my child, we must always remember that we are all 'under authority.' Although I am a colonel, I must obey orders just as unquestioningly as the youngest recruit, and if my Monica would be a true soldier's daughter, she must learn first of all to be obedient. It is a hard, a very hard lesson to learn, and neither you nor I can hope to master it, unless we ask His help who was obedient even unto death.

"It is difficult for me to explain what I mean, for I am naturally very reserved over religious things; but I am confident of this, my child, that if you took Jesus Christ as your Example, you would grow day by day more like Him, and you would soon learn to shun all the faults and failings which now threaten to spoil your character."

"I wish I could, daddy dear," sighed Monica, as she re-read the lines, "but there is no one here to help me. I don't believe grandmamma is a bit religious, for any little excuse is enough to keep her away from church on Sunday mornings, and she never goes out at night. And all the time I have been here she has never said a word about it, except to ask me once or twice if I remember to say my prayers. Neither did any of the governesses, except Miss Romaine, and grandmamma was glad when she went, because she said she had such 'peculiar views.' Well, perhaps some one at the new school will show me how to be 'good.'" And Monica tossed her letter into one of the table drawers, and began with commendable zeal to make herself more tidy than she had been for a long time. She knew that that was one step in the right direction.

The next day the family lawyer was closeted with Mrs. Beauchamp for over an hour. She told him of her son's desire that Monica should go daily to school, and asked his advice as to a suitable one.

"There is not much choice in the neighbourhood of Mydenham," said Mr. Bertram as he tapped his gold-rimmed spectacles meditatively on his knee. "We are just beyond the suburban limits here, you see, and consequently suffer in various ways. Let me see, there is Miss Beach's on the Osmington Road; she receives a few day-scholars, I believe, although hers is primarily a boarding school."

"That will not do," replied the old lady decisively. "The late Mrs. Conrad had a very strong objection to a boarding-school life for Monica."

"Certainly, certainly," agreed the obsequious man of law, although he by no means agreed with the late Mrs. Beauchamp's views; "then I do not see that there is any other resource than the High school at Osmington."

"Oh! that is two miles away, and I have never thought very much of High Schools; there is no restriction as to the social position of the scholars. Really, I don't think I----" And Mrs. Beauchamp paused helplessly.

"If the distance were not an insuperable objection, I think, under the circumstances, no school could better be calculated to meet with Colonel Beauchamp's wishes," said the lawyer, with decision. "You say he expressly desires his daughter to mix with companions of her own age, and have the opportunity of plenty of open-air exercise, and yet be under firm, but well-regulated control. As regards its educational system, I venture to say that in very few respects can the High School methods be improved upon. Of course, the girls are drawn from varied ranks, but in a day school it is unnecessary, indeed, it is impossible, for them to have much opportunity of mixing with more than a few of the pupils, and naturally your granddaughter would make companions of those who were in a similar social position to her own."

"Well, I'm sure I don't know," replied Mrs. Beauchamp, while her face still wore its perturbed look; "Monica is so rash, she would be just as likely to choose a butcher's or grocer's daughter as any one else."

"I doubt if there are many there," said Mr. Bertram, smiling. "I have always heard that the Osmington school is one of the best, and Mr. Drury and Canon Monroe have daughters there, as well as many other leading families."

"If the Osmington clergy think the school is good enough, I suppose it is all right," agreed his client, not without some misgivings, still. "The distance is the difficulty; but Barnes must accompany Monica, and the regular walks will, no doubt, be good for her."

"The majority of the pupils who live at a distance bicycle there," observed the lawyer.

"Most unwomanly!" was Mrs. Beauchamp's horrified reply. "I cannot imag-

ine what the mothers of the present day are dreaming of. We might as well have no girls at all; they seem to become boys as soon as they can toddle. No, Monica shall not have a bicycle. If she must go to the school, she must; but she will walk when fine, and Richards will have to drive her in the brougham when it is wet. I suppose--oh, dear me! I do wish she had been reasonable and got on with her governesses."

With an almost imperceptible shrug of his shoulders, Mr. Bertram bade his client good-day, having undertaken to make all necessary arrangements. He was a childless man himself, but he felt sure that had he possessed a high-spirited daughter like Monica, he could have improved upon Mrs. Beauchamp's method of up-bringing.

CHAPTER II.

"SUCH A *DEAR*LITTLE MONKEY!"

But there were weightier matters in the lawyer's mind than the choice of a school for incorrigible girls, and he was soon pondering deeply over a compensation case, as he strode along the stretch of almost countrified road which connected the residential district of Mydenham with the parent town of Osmington.

He was nearing the latter, and had just consulted his watch, in view of an important appointment, when, turning a corner sharply, he collided with a young lady of nineteen or thereabouts, who, with a small brother and sister, was coming in the opposite direction.

"I'm *so* sorry, Mr. Bertram."

"My dear Miss Franklyn, I beg your pardon," the lawyer ejaculated, as he straightened his hat and readjusted his spectacles, which had nearly fallen off in the contretemps. "I hope I didn't hurt you?" and he looked apologetically into the bright smiling eyes of the girl, who found it difficult to refrain from laughing outright.

"Not a bit, thank you," was Kathleen Franklyn's reply. "It was quite as much my fault as yours. I am afraid I was not looking where I was going; these chicks were drawing my attention to an organ-grinder, with a little monkey, across the road."

As she spoke, she looked round, expecting to find the children close at hand. But alas! they had seized the opportunity--far too delightful to lose--of sister

Kath's attention being distracted for a moment, and with wonderful noiselessness and rapidity had crossed the wide road, on which the traffic was somewhat heavy, and were already some little distance away, following with a small crowd of children in the wake of the wonderful monkey.

"Oh! those naughty children," she cried, "they are always up to mischief. You and Mrs. Bertram are saved no end of anxiety by having none."

"At any rate, they would have got past the monkey-admiring age by now," was Mr. Bertram's reply, albeit there was a gleam of sadness in his eyes, and a sigh escaped his lips. "But we must go after these young miscreants speedily."

"Oh! please don't trouble," said Kathleen as she walked on quickly beside him; "I shall soon pick them up, and I know you are in a hurry."

"Because I tried to knock you down," he replied, with an amused laugh. "The mischief I have done to-day is accumulating terribly."

"If you have done no one any more harm than you have done me, I think you need not begin to clothe yourself in sackcloth and ashes on account of your sins at present," was Kathleen's saucily given reply, as she shook hands hastily upon reaching Mr. Bertram's office, and hurried after the children, whom she had kept well in view.

"A charming girl," soliloquised the little lawyer as he entered his dull-looking office, and felt as if he had left all the brightness outside. "Franklyn is to be envied having such a troop of young people about him. But I daresay he looks at it in quite another light: probably that of *£ s. d.* Well, well, the best of us are never satisfied, but I must say life would be very different for Mary and me if we had a bright young thing like Kathleen Franklyn about the house." And then he turned his attention to legal affairs.

Meanwhile, Kathleen had succeeded in catching up to the little truants, and was giving them a lecture on their misbehaviour, in what was intended to be a very severe tone.

"It was really *very* naughty, Joan, very naughty indeed. You are older than Paddy, and should not have taken him into mischief." And she looked reproachfully into the dark grey eyes of the little girl, whose hand she now held tightly. "You might have been knocked down, and run over, or even lost. All sorts of things might have happened to you," she added, piling on the agony, for she thought she might as well do it thoroughly while she was about it.

"Oh, Kathie, we didn't mean to be naughty, truly we didn't," said little Joan, somewhat awed by the calamities which her big sister was enumerating so glibly; "did we, Paddy?"

"No, didn't mean to be naughty," repeated five-year-old Paddy solemnly, a simply seraphic look on his sweet little face, which was surrounded by a halo of golden curls. "But it was such a *dear* little monkey!" And he half turned his head,

with a longing look after the object of his affections, now almost out of sight in the distance.

But Kathleen drew him on. "Well, promise me never to run off like that alone, again," she said, "or poor mother would be dreadfully upset. Just fancy if I had gone home without you, what would she have said?"

"Spect she'd have said 'good riddance'!" was Master Pat's saucy rejoinder, as he looked roguishly up at his tall sister.

"Oh! Pat, you are well called 'The Pickle,'" she cried, as she held the little chubby hand even more tightly, for this baby brother was the pet and plaything of the whole family, albeit he kept them continually on thorns with the endless mischief he managed to get into.

"Must you tell mother we ran away from you, Kathie?" whispered Joan, beseechingly, as they neared home. She was a very tender-hearted little maiden, who would seldom have given any trouble but for Paddy's mischievous suggestions, and the thought of her mother being grieved troubled her.

"No, dearie, I don't think we will tell her this time; but you won't do it again, will you?" said kind-hearted Kathleen, as she pushed open the heavy iron gate, and the trio walked up the somewhat weed-covered path, leading to a substantial red brick house, well known in Osmington as Dr. Franklyn's.

As they entered the door, a girl of fourteen or so, a younger edition of Kathleen, rushed out into the hall.

"What an age you've been, Kath!" she cried impetuously. "Elsa and I thought you were never coming. Did you get what we wanted?"

"Yes, yes, Olive, I have it all right, but give me time to breathe," said Kathleen, as her younger sister began scrimmaging in her pocket. "Mind you don't upset it!"

"You dear old granny, how can it be upset if it isn't opened yet?" was the laughing reply, as Olive succeeded in securing a large tin of enamel. "But, oh! Kath, what shall we do for a brush?" And her face fell considerably at the thought.

"Well, I may be a 'granny,' but even they can be useful, for I had the sense to bring not only one, but two brushes!" And Kathleen produced them with a merry laugh.

"Well, you are a dear old darling"; and Olive hugged her sister rapturously. "Now Elsa and I can both paint at the same time. Send the children to Nanny, Kath, and then come up quickly to the 'den.' We've only half an hour before tea."

She flew up the shabbily carpeted stairs, two steps at a time, and finally arrived at the top story, breathless. Bursting into one of the roomy attics, Olive sank down upon the first chair she came to from sheer want of breath; but she quickly got up again with an exclamation of dismay, for she remembered now it was too late that that was where she had hastily stood the saucer of turpentine she had been using when she rushed off downstairs to meet Kathleen.

"What's the matter, couldn't Kath get the paint?" queried a voice from the other end of the quaint, odd-shaped room, and her twin-sister came slowly forward.

Strangers never knew Olive and Elsa Franklyn apart, so much alike were they in outward appearance, the dark hair and eyes, full rosy lips and slightly upturned nose of the one being a perfect replica of the other. But the similarity was only external; in habits and character they were as widely diverse as the poles. Elsa was as quiet and methodical as Olive was noisy and impetuous in her actions; indeed their mother sometimes said she wished they could have been a little less alike outwardly, and a little more alike inwardly. It would have been better in every way, she thought; only it was two Elsas, not two Olives, that she would have chosen.

"Oh, I say, mother will be frantic!" cried Olive, as she vainly endeavoured to see the extent of the damage done to her light grey dress. Fortunately, the saucer did not contain much more than the dregs of the turpentine cook had given them, somewhat gingerly; but alas! the old bookcase and table that Olive had been seized with a desire to rejuvenate, had been scarlet during the last phase of their existence, so that the turpentine they had been cleaning them with had become decidedly reddish! Consequently the skirt had taken that tone.

"You *have* made yourself in a mess," was all Elsa could say, as she stood helplessly looking at the ugly stain which was growing visibly larger, for the material had soaked up all the mixture.

"If that's all you can do to help, you may just as well go on with your old hammering," blurted out Olive, her vexation at the mishap fast turning into anger, for she knew punishment would inevitably follow upon discovery. "I never did know such a stupid thing as you are, Elsa." And Olive blinked desperately hard to keep back the tears, which seemed as if they would choke, as well as blind her.

"I don't see *what* you can do," said poor Elsa, bravely refraining from an angry retort. There were those among her acquaintances who were wont to declare that she had not sufficient spirit to hold her own with her somewhat tyrannical twin sister. But Elsa Franklyn had lately learnt that it is "the soft answer that turneth away wrath;" and although she was often sorely tempted to return evil for evil, she remembered Him who never answered back, and day by day the quiet, unobtrusive girl was growing more like the Saviour whom she humbly sought to please.

"Hadn't you better change your dress, Olive," she suggested, as her sister twisted the skirt, first this way, and then that, to get a better idea of the extent of the damage.

"Quite a brilliant idea, Miss Elsa," was Olive's sarcastic reply; "just what I was going to do." And the girl, who knew she had only her own carelessness to

thank for the catastrophe, gave the unoffending chair such a kick with her foot as she was going out of the door, that the saucer, which was still upon it, slid off the shiny seat, and falling on the linoleum-covered floor, was smashed into little bits.

"Oh, Olive!"

"Horrid, aggravating thing!" cried the hot-tempered girl. "Won't old Cookey be mad, though? She wanted to find an odd one, but she couldn't, so she gave me one of the kitchen set. I *shall* catch it, when she knows. But there's no hurry about that, the frock's the worst."

Meanwhile, Elsa had been carefully collecting all the broken bits of china into an old box-lid, and was wiping up the floor with some rag they had been using to clean their woodwork with. For a minute she was inclined to let Olive bear the brunt of the cook's wrath, as a punishment for her silly outburst of temper, but the next she said quietly: "I will take this down to the kitchen, Ollie, and explain to cook, while you go and change your frock. And if I can find Kathleen anywhere, I will send her up to you. She will know what had better be done to it."

With an incomprehensive look at Elsa, as if such conduct were beyond her ken, Olive burst out, "Well, you are a dear good creature, Elsa; I'm sorry now I was cross to you," and she looked affectionately into the quiet face Elsa lifted to hers, as she rose from her stooping posture. They were never at variance for long, this pair of twins, for if Olive was careless and hot-tempered she was also generous and affectionate.

"I know you didn't mean it," was all Elsa said, but the smile which irradiated her face at the words of commendation was good to see.

Elsa soon put matters right with cook (who had been for many years a faithful servant in the doctor's busy household) and was on her way to find Kathleen, when she heard her name called.

"Elsa, dear!"

Gently pushing open the door of a room that was half bedroom and half boudoir, she found the object of her search sitting beside a couch on which reclined a delicate looking lady, who, from the resemblance her daughter bore her, was unmistakably their mother.

"Did you want me, mamma?" she said, as she bent over the invalid.

"Yes, darling, I heard a noise like something falling upstairs a little while ago, and I was afraid one of you was hurt."

Elsa had to stoop quite low to hear the whispered words, for it had been one of the fragile mother's bad days, and she was very weak.

In a few words Elsa explained the catastrophe, taking care not to make the worst of Olive's temper; but both the mother and Kathleen read between the lines.

The latter rose hastily, a look of annoyance on her girlish face.

"Really, Olive is too careless," she said indignantly. "She is always spoiling

something; only last week she tore a long zig-zag slit in her blue serge dress, and now this grey one will be ruined, and she will have nothing fit to go back to school in. I must go and see what can be done, I suppose, but I shall give her a good scolding."

"Don't be too harsh with her, Kathie," pleaded her mother. "It was very thoughtless of her, I know, but she will soon grow older now and be more careful. Girls will be girls." And she looked at her tall, handsome daughter, who had never given her a quarter of the trouble that Olive had, with admiring and yet wistful eyes. How she wished for the sake of her eight robust sons and daughters that she had not been compelled, since Paddy's babyhood, to spend the greater part of her life in her own room. But yet she could not regret the imprisonment, for it was only since she had been forced to give up her busy active life in the large household, where the doctor's income never seemed sufficient to meet the huge demands made upon it, that she had learnt that bringing up her boys and girls to be healthy and happy was not all that was necessary. God had taken the busy mother aside, and had shown her that her children were only lent to her, to be trained for Him. And she had heard His loving voice, and was seeking now to do what she could to make amends for the years of lost opportunities. Her eldest daughter Lois (who, as far as she could, had taken her mother's place in the household) and Elsa had already chosen "that good part which shall never be taken away." But the mother-heart yearned over her two big sons, Roger and Dick, winsome Kathleen and careless Olive.

She held Elsa's warm young hand in her nerveless grasp, as Kathleen closed the door behind her, and drew the girlish face, aglow with health, down to hers, until their lips met in a long, lingering caress; this quiet, thoughtful little daughter was a great comfort to her mother.

"I am afraid poor Olive was in a temper again, Elsa, for I do not see how the saucer could have fallen by itself. But do not tell me, dear; I will speak to her myself when she comes in to see me later on."

"She doesn't get into a temper *quite* so often as she used to, mamma," said Elsa, eager to defend the absentee. "At least, we don't have so many quarrels now."

"I can guess why that is," whispered Mrs. Franklyn, tenderly, as she stroked the dark hair with her soft white fingers; "it takes two to make a quarrel, I used to be told in my childhood, and my Elsa tries very hard nowadays not to be one of the two, doesn't she?"

"Yes, mamma, generally, but I don't always succeed," and the girlish head was half hidden in the rug which covered her mother's slight form, so that her words were only just audible. "Sometimes I fail; I did yesterday when we were having a game, but oh! mamma, I was so sorry afterwards." And she raised her tear-dimmed eyes to her mother's face.

"Did you tell Jesus, darling?"

"Oh! yes, mamma. I always do, directly, and----"

"He has forgiven you, then, Elsa?"

"Yes, mamma, I know He has; but oh! I do wish I could remember quicker, so as not to let the hasty words slip out. It must grieve Him so!"

"So it does, my childie, but I am sure He is pleased, too, when He sees how hard you fight against this enemy of yours, and He is only too ready to help you. Keep looking to Him for strength, Elsa, and go on persevering, and pray for Olive, dear; her enemy is stronger far than yours, and she does not try to conquer it."

"I do, mamma, I do," murmured her little daughter.

And then the tea-bell sounded through the house, summoning all the young folk to the large, plainly furnished dining-room where Lois Franklyn presided over the tea-tray. "Just her mother over again," was Dr. Franklyn's description of his eldest daughter, but there seemed little resemblance, nowadays, between the fragile invalid and this tall, capable young woman of three-and-twenty. Lois was not so handsome as Kathleen, but there was a certain indescribable charm about her, a nameless something which was wont to retain the admiration that Kathleen's more youthful beauty at first sight attracted.

From furtive glances at Kathleen and Olive, Elsa gathered that no serious trouble had arisen between the sisters; indeed, Olive seemed on her best behaviour. So Elsa breathed freely, and concluded that the turpentine incident had blown over, as no mention was made of it. The meal passed merrily enough; Kathleen's racy account of her contretemps with Mr. Bertram amusing them very much. Paddy and Joan were just being reprimanded by Lois for running away, when Dr. Franklyn appeared on the scene, tired out after a long round of visits, and his children vied with each other in making him comfortable.

"How is your mother, Lois?" was his first query, as she poured out a cup of tea, and begged him to drink it at once, assuring him that the invalid had rested a little, and felt a trifle better.

He drank it hastily, and then set the cup down, saying: "I will have some more when I come back: only one of you girls need wait for me."

And Lois, seeing that he was physically worn out, despatched the younger ones in various directions, as soon as they had finished their tea, and thus secured a quiet room for her father in which to have his long-waited-for meal in peace.

CHAPTER III.

"I'M MOVED UP!"

The Rev. Herbert Drury sat in his study chair deep in thought. His writing table was strewn with letters answered, and unanswered, for he had been trying to make up arrears in his correspondence that morning. At his elbow lay his well-worn Bible, open, for very few of his letters were written without consulting that; but the case under consideration, just now, needed personal help rather than clerical advice.

His dark hair, already thickly streaked with grey, although he was less than forty-five, was crisply cut, and an iron-grey moustache gave him a decidedly military appearance. His keen, dark eyes could, on occasion, flash a scrutinising glance, and delinquents felt he must be reading their very thoughts, but their habitual expression was one of kindly sympathy. Mr. Drury had only been Vicar of St. Paul's, Osmington, for a couple of years, but he had won the love and respect of all his clerical brothers in the neighbourhood, although their doctrinal opinions widely differed; his was such a singularly attractive personality. His church-workers felt no work was tedious or uphill, for was not their vicar interested in every detail, aiding personally every scheme that was set on foot for the evangelising of the very poverty-stricken part of the town which comprised his parish. Of money, he had by no means a superabundance, for the living was a poor one, and he was a younger son; but, like St. Peter of old, he could say with truth: "Such as I have, give I thee."

And if the vicar was beloved, his wife was no less so: she was, in every sense, a true help-meet. He was thinking of her now, as he considered the sad case which had just been brought to his notice by a note from one of the district-visitors, and he decided to ask her advice. He strode across the study, and opening the door, called "Nora" in a resonant voice, which was calculated, if necessary, to penetrate to the topmost story of the roomy vicarage.

"One minute, dear," was the brisk reply, from the dim recesses of a store-cupboard at the extreme end of the hall, and in less than that time Mrs. Drury appeared upon the scene. She was a plump little woman, with soft brown eyes and hair which waved a trifle, but otherwise was combed smoothly back from her broad white brow. Her blue serge dress was enveloped in a large holland apron, for she was on housekeeping work intent that morning; indeed, her hands bore traces of some floury substance which she was emptying when the vicar called her. Her bright face, still young enough to possess a dimple in the chin, was flushed with the exercise of trotting back and forth between store-cupboard and kitchen, and to her husband she made a sweet, homely picture as she entered his study, ready to help him in whatever way he needed.

"Sit down a minute, Nora," he said, as he pushed an arm-chair forward, "there is a very sad case here." And the vicar unburdened his mind.

For a few minutes they chatted over the sad details of the case in point, and as the vicar had expected, Mrs. Drury's woman's wit saw a way of helping, quicker than he had done.

"Well, I will call there first thing this afternoon," he said, as his wife returned to her interrupted duties.

As she arranged her stores, she contrasted the sad state of the little blind girl for whom they had just been planning, with the happy lot of her own little daughter. "Thank God my precious Amethyst has her eyesight," she murmured; and then, as a deep-toned clock struck the hour, she added: "Why, it is striking one! She will be home directly; I must hurry."

In a few minutes the stores were all put away, the apron removed, and Mrs. Drury was standing in the large bay window of the dining-room watching for her little daughter to return from school, while the housemaid laid the table for dinner. Very soon she descried a trim little figure, clad in scarlet, hastening along the pavement, swinging her lesson books by their strap, and waving her hand gaily in response to her mother's smile, and in a moment more she was in Mrs. Drury's arms.

"Oh! mumsie darling," she cried, breathlessly, "I'm moved up!"

"Are you, my pet? I'm so glad." And her mother pressed loving kisses upon the upturned face, all quivering with the excitement of telling her news. "Then you are in the Upper School now?"

"Yes, mumsie, the Fourth Form. And Olive and Elsa Franklyn, and Gipsy Monroe and a lot of others have been moved up too. And oh! mumsie, there's a new----"

Here she paused from sheer want of breath, and Mrs. Drury interposed saying: "You shall tell me your news presently, darling, but now you must run and make yourself tidy for dinner, for there is the gong."

A winsome little lassie was Amethyst Drury; at least, so her fond parents thought. She looked less than her fourteen years, because she was so very slight, and the pretty fair hair, simply tied back with a scarlet ribbon, and falling loose about her neck, accentuated the appearance of fragility. Her scarlet frock was almost hidden by the white overall pinafore which her mother sensibly insisted upon her wearing indoors, and which really added to the charm of her appearance. Amethyst was not specially good-looking, but her soft complexion and sparkling grey eyes made up for any little defects in her mouth and nose, the former being a trifle too large, and the latter too *retroussé*, to be termed strictly pretty.

"Well, girlie," said her father, as grace having been said he began to carve the joint of roast beef; "how did you get on the first day of term?"

"Pretty well, I think, thank you, father, although the lessons seem harder now than they did with Miss Hemming; I've brought home a lot for to-morrow," and Amethyst looked somewhat ruefully at the lesson books lying on the table in the window.

"You must expect to pay the penalty of honour," remarked the vicar, who had, of course, been immediately informed of the change of class. "You cannot hope to be so high in this form as you were in the other, Amethyst, because many of these girls will be older than you, I presume."

"Yes, father, some of them are, but they can't be very sharp or they would not have been left behind. I am going to try hard to get near the top of this class by the time the reports come out," said Amethyst, a ring of determination in her young voice, as she began to attack her dinner with a school-girl's appetite.

Her parents exchanged glances. "My girlie mustn't be too confident of her own powers," said Mrs. Drury gently, but firmly; "father and I want you to do your very best to learn well, and grow up to be a clever woman, but you must not expect to take all the honours, Amethyst."

"Oh! of course, mumsie, I only meant I was going to do my lessons as well as I possibly could," and the clear grey eyes met her mother's unfalteringly. "There are several girls who are really clever, in my form now, who find it quite easy to learn difficult things. I wish I did," she added with a little sigh.

"You must remember the hare and the tortoise, girlie," said the vicar, with a smile. "If you have more trouble to learn than they do, you may depend upon it you will remember better. Are there any new girls?"

"Only one in our form, father, and she comes from Mydenham. Her name is Monica Beauchamp. I don't think I like her very much," added Amethyst meditatively.

"Don't judge hastily, darling," said her mother; "she may be a very nice girl, when you know her."

"I am sure you wouldn't like her, mumsie," said her little daughter, positively, "she seems so off-hand; and once or twice she was quite rude to Miss Churchill. Why, she actually said----"

"Hush! dear, no tale-telling. You know, girlie, I only want to hear nice things about your school companions. Perhaps it would be wiser not to make a close friend of this Monica, just at present, but always be kind and courteous. I daresay she feels strange among you all, especially if she is not accustomed to school. How old is she?"

"Fifteen; but she is such a big girl, mumsie, quite as tall as some of the girls in the Fifth. She went in the school door as I did this morning, and some elderly person was with her. I thought perhaps it was her mother or aunt, although she didn't look a very kind one; but Monica said: 'That will do, Barnes, you need not

come any farther,' in such a commanding tone, so I suppose she was a servant."

"I expect the young lady in question is a granddaughter of Mrs. Beauchamp, of Carson Rise," remarked Mr. Drury. "I have heard she has one living with her."

"Yes, she is, father," said Amethyst, eager to show off her knowledge. "Olive and Elsa knew her by sight. They said she had had *four* daily governesses, and she wouldn't obey one of them. That's why her grandmother has sent her to school." Amethyst's face wore an awe-struck expression; such a terrible state of affairs seemed incredible to her.

"I am surprised at the Franklyns for repeating such a thing. At any rate *we* will not discuss this Monica's misdeeds, Amethyst, we have plenty of faults of our own." Mrs. Drury spoke sternly, and then she changed the subject.

Her little daughter looked very abashed, and was quite quiet for a few minutes; her mother seldom spoke in so severe a tone, her rule was rather one of love. But she had a great aversion to tittle-tattling, and endeavoured to check every indication of it in Amethyst's school-girl talk.

The cheerful midday meal concluded, the vicar prepared for an afternoon's parochial visiting. Mrs. Drury got out her work-basket in order to finish a garment she was making for a poor old woman, who used to attend her mothers' meeting. Amethyst amused herself with alternately talking to the canary, whose cage hung in one of the sunny windows, and playing with a beautiful black and white cat, who stretched himself lazily on the hearthrug, and blinked his eyes and purred in appreciation of his little mistress's fondling.

"Shall I get out my lessons now, mumsie; they will take me a good long time to-day?" she asked, when she was tired of amusing herself.

"No, dear, I think you shall leave them until after tea," said Mrs. Drury, as she sewed on the last button, and folded up her work. "I am going to take this to old Mrs. Robbins, and you may go with me."

"Oh, lovely!" cried Amethyst excitedly, as she jumped up with alacrity. "I like going to see your dear little old women, mumsie. I don't think I know Mrs. Robbins."

"I hardly think you do, dear. But come, let us get ready, and go at once."

Although St. Paul's Vicarage was situated in a by no means grand locality, a very few minutes brisk walking brought Mrs. Drury and Amethyst into widely different surroundings. Long rows of tenement houses looking on to the ugly brick buildings which comprised the iron foundry where most of the husbands and sons earned their daily bread, were traversed before they paused at an almost paintless door, bearing the number 75, but guiltless of a knocker.

Applying the handle of her umbrella briskly, Mrs. Drury waited for some one to admit her. But instead of the door being opened, a feeble voice was heard saying: "Please come in." And bidding Amethyst follow her, she turned the rickety

handle and entered the squalid-looking house. For a moment it was so dark after the bright sunlight outside, that she could scarcely see her way, but she soon descried another door on her left, and pushing that open, a certain amount of light illumined the dark passage.

"Come in, ma'am, do 'ee come in," cried a quavering old voice from the interior of the room, and Mrs. Drury led Amethyst, who was somewhat shy of strangers, into the tidy but comfortless apartment, and shut the door.

"Well, Mrs. Robbins, how are you to-day?" she enquired sympathetically, as she gently shook the poor old hand, badly crippled with rheumatism.

"Only very middlin', ma'am, very middlin'," said the poor old soul, as she begged her visitors to be seated. Mrs. Drury drew the only available chair up to the side of the poor miserable bed, and Amethyst found a little wooden footstool, upon which she perched herself as best she could. The old woman's dim eyes lit up as she saw the bright face and hair of her little visitor.

"La, bless me, ma'am, she's just for all the world like a fairy," she said, and she struggled to raise her poor old body the better to feast her eyes on the pretty picture, but a low moan of pain escaped her lips. "'Tis these screwmatics," she explained, as Mrs. Drury bent over her tenderly, "my back and legs is awful to-day."

"Have you had any medicine lately, and who looks after you, Mrs. Robbins?" said the lady, sympathetically.

"My darter-in-law looks in most days, and her little gal runs of arrants for me; they live at No. 68, just below. No, ma'am, I haven't had any medicine for a good bit now, it don't seem much use like. But there, ma'am, the Almighty is wonderful good to me. I have never been without a bite or a sup yet, and there's a many can't say as much as that, poor things of 'em."

"Perhaps they don't look to Him for succour as you do," was Mrs. Drury's gentle reply, as she stroked the poor knotted fingers.

"Ah, ma'am, that's true, more's the pity of it. I mind when I was young, like little missy there, my father used to say to me: 'Now, Jemima, my gal, never you do nothing as'll make you shamed for God Almighty to see, and you may depend upon it, He'll look to it that you never want.' Sometimes, when I was young and foolish, I used ter think as there was a many things I wanted, and never got, but now I'm growing old, and the Golden City is very near, I seem quite content-like."

"Shall I just read a few words to you?" said Mrs. Drury, as she opened her little pocket Bible at the book of the Revelation.

"Aye, please do, ma'am," and the dear old soul lay placidly listening to the beautiful description given by St. John of the New Jerusalem, where there shall be no more pain, hunger, or tears, for those who have been washed in the blood of the Lamb.

"Beautiful, beautiful words," murmured old Mrs. Robbins, as she drank in the comforting promises; "we'll not remember the trials and troubles of this life when we are up yonder."

"Now, Amethyst, dear, before we go, just sing a nice hymn for Mrs. Robbins," said Mrs. Drury, to her little daughter, who had been a silent spectator so far.

"What might little missy's name be, ma'am?" enquired the old woman, with some curiosity.

"Amethyst," replied Mrs. Drury, with a smile. "An unusual one, isn't it? but her father and I chose it for a special reason."

"'Tis one of the precious stones in the Bible, surely," said Mrs. Robbins; "one of all they long-named things as is going to be in the walls of the golden city."

"Yes, it is a Bible name, and has a special meaning, signifying an abhorrence of the drink which is such a curse to our land. We want our little daughter to grow up to be a true Amethyst. Now, dearie, sing your hymn."

"Shall it be 'There is a city bright,' mumsie? Would Mrs. Robbins like that?"

"Yes, dear, I am sure she would. Come and stand close by me, and sing very clearly, girlie," and Mrs. Drury took one of the white-gloved hands in her own, and held it lovingly while her little daughter's clear, childish treble filled the bare room.

"There is a city bright
Closed are its gates to sin,
Naught that defileth,
Naught that defileth,
Can ever enter in.

"Saviour, I come to Thee!
Oh, Lamb of God, I pray,--
Cleanse me and save me,
Cleanse me and save me,
Wash all my sins away.

"Lord, make me, from this hour,
Thy loving child to be,
Kept by Thy power,
Kept by Thy power,
From all that grieveth Thee.

"Till in the snowy dress
Of Thy redeemed I stand;

Faultless and stainless,
Faultless and stainless,
Safe in that happy land."

"Thank you, my dearie, thank you," said the old woman gratefully, as the last word died away. "And thank you kindly, ma'am, for coming to cheer an old body up."

"I will come again when I can, Mrs. Robbins; meanwhile here is a comfortable loose gown for you to use, either when you sit up again, or in bed, just as you like, and a trifle to buy a few little extras with."

The poor old cripple's dim eyes filled with tears as she saw the nice grey woollen wrapper, and felt the half-crown pressed into her wrinkled palm.

"God bless you, dear lady! God Almighty bless and reward you!" was all she could say.

And, quite understanding, Mrs. Drury gently bade Amethyst open the door, and in a moment more their footsteps resounded along the uneven pavement.

CHAPTER IV.

"I WISH YOU'D BE FRIENDS WITH ME."

Mrs. Drury and Amethyst walked along silently for a few minutes, each apparently busy with her own thoughts. The former was thinking how best she could aid the poor old cripple she had just left, while her little daughter was pondering over the history of her name. They had reached a more open thoroughfare when Amethyst broke the silence.

"Amethyst is *rather* a funny name for a girl, don't you think, mumsie?"

Suddenly recalled from a mental calculation in which blankets and beef-tea played a prominent part, Mrs. Drury smiled down at her little daughter. "Do you think so, girlie?" was all she said.

"Well, yes, I do," confessed Amethyst, slowly. "Although the girls at the High School have nicknamed me 'Thistle,' they tease me about my proper name sometimes, and say I might as well have been called Sapphire or Topaz, or one of those long names which begin with a 'C.' I can't pronounce them properly, but you know the ones I mean, mumsie."

"Yes, dear, I know. You mean chrysolite and chalcedony and chrysoprasus," said her mother, with a smile; "but they are very different. Your father and I chose your name because of its meaning, for a special reason, as we have often told you, Amethyst. When we used to live in the East-end of London, where you were born, there was so much sin and sorrow all round us everywhere, caused by strong drink, that we resolved to call you Amethyst, so that you might always be a reminder to us of our promise not to have anything to do with it. And there was another reason, girlie," Mrs. Drury dropped her voice, and spoke softly. "Your father and I have always hoped and prayed, from your very babyhood, that when you were grown up you might become a worker in the noble army of men and women who are fighting, in God's strength, against this dreadful enemy of our beloved England."

"How could I, mother?" Amethyst asked wonderingly; she had never been told so much as this before.

"There are many ways, dear," replied her mother, "in which people can influence those around them in the cause of total abstinence. Some are wanted who can write books and articles; others who can speak in favour of it. But it is early days for us to plan your future, girlie; when you have left school far behind and are quite grown up, it will be easier to see how you can best live up to your name."

"I think I should like to be a speaker," said Amethyst meditatively.

"You are one now, I think, girlie," said Mrs. Drury, with a little laugh. "You know father says you are a regular chatterbox. Now, let us go into Wilson's and get some of those nice scones for tea, and then we must hurry home."

They had just emerged from the confectioner's, and were crossing the road, when Amethyst espied the two Franklyn girls coming towards them.

"There are Olive and Elsa," she said, delightedly; and then she added, persuasively, "Oh! mumsie, do you think they might come to tea with us to-day?"

"Not to-day, darling, I think, because you have all your lessons to do, and there is scarcely time for them to go home and get permission, now. But they might come on Saturday," she added, as Amethyst looked very doleful. "Let us speak to them."

"How do you do, dears?" was Mrs. Drury's bright greeting, as she shook hands with the twins. "How is your mother to-day?"

"Father thinks she is a little better, thank you, Mrs. Drury." It was Elsa who spoke; Olive always deputed her sister to give the latest bulletins of her mother's health.

"I am glad to hear that," said Mrs. Drury warmly; "will you give her my love, and tell her I hope to come and see her very soon? Meanwhile, Amethyst and I are wondering whether she would allow you both to come to tea next Saturday."

"Oh! thank you very much, Mrs. Drury, we shall be delighted to come," said

Olive, a ring of pleasure in her tones; they always enjoyed themselves at St. Paul's Vicarage.

"I think we had better just ask first," ventured Elsa, "although I feel sure mother will be very pleased."

"Quite right, dear," said Mrs. Drury, looking approvingly at Elsa, so that she did not see Olive shrug her shoulders disdainfully. "Come early in the afternoon, if you may, so that you and Amethyst can have some fun together in the garden. I hear you have all been moved up," she added, as they began to separate.

"Yes, an awful nuisance, I call it," said Olive; "we shall have no end of home-work to do now. That algebra we did this morning is stupid stuff, isn't it, Thistle? All silly little letters and numbers that don't seem to mean anything. I couldn't make head or tail of it."

"I rather liked it," said Amethyst.

"So did I," admitted Elsa.

"Well, you all ought to grow up very clever women," said Mrs. Drury, with a smile. "I hope you will all do something great some day."

"No fear of that for me," was Olive's nonchalant reply, as Amethyst and her mother hurried on.

"I hope mother will let us go on Saturday," said Elsa, as the twins walked in the direction of home.

"Why, of course she will, you stupid; how often does she refuse us?" cried her sister, snappishly. She had an uncomfortable sense of having lowered herself somehow in Mrs. Drury's estimation, and was not best pleased with Elsa for appearing to correct her before that lady.

"No, she is always so pleased for us to go to the vicarage," said Elsa, wisely refraining from adding fuel to the fire by saying what she might have said; namely, that she had seen Mrs. Drury's look of astonishment when Olive calmly accepted the invitation without any reference to their mother. "We must be quick, now, Olive, or we shall be late for tea; it is just upon five by the post-office clock."

The three girls met again next morning in the Fourth Form cloakroom, where the pupils took off their outdoor garments, and changed their shoes. They had the narrow, partitioned-off room, with its rows of clothes-hooks and pigeon-holes for boots, to themselves, for a moment. But as they were rather late, Elsa, whose division was nearest to Amethyst's, could only just whisper, "We may come on Saturday," before the bell, which summoned them all to their places in the large hall, warned them to lose no time.

Scrambling into their slippers, and hanging hats and coats on their respective pegs, the trio hastened into the hall, and were each in their own particular place by the time the bell ceased clanging: much to Elsa's and Amethyst's delight, as they had no wish to begin so early in the term with a late mark. Olive was one

of the happy-go-lucky sort who did not mind a few marks one way or the other.

Indeed, she ran the risk of losing a conduct mark by nudging Elsa, and whispering: "Monica Beauchamp is----" just as Miss Buckingham, the head-mistress, who conducted prayers from a raised platform at one end of the hall, announced the number of the hymn.

But Elsa only smiled, and resolutely turned her head away from Olive, so that the sentence remained unfinished.

Prayers over, and the various notices relative to the new term having been given out, the classes filed into their classrooms, which all opened off the spacious hall, with the exception of the First and Sixth Forms, whose rooms were on the first floor, where were also the studio, music-rooms and others used for various purposes.

There was a friendly rivalry among the girls with respect to the appearance of their own particular classrooms, and they had inaugurated a fund among themselves for decorative purposes, by means of which plants and pictures, etc., were purchased for the adornment of the rooms.

The Fourth Form, by reason of its position, had the best view of all the classrooms, for it overlooked the prettily laid out garden of Miss Buckingham's private house, so that the girls of that form always tried to outdo the others in their decoration of the room itself. And indeed, as the twenty or more girls filed into it that bright May morning, and took their places, each at her own desk, it looked a charming room. Half a dozen pretty engravings, well-framed, and a couple of coloured maps, on rollers, adorned the walls which were painted a pale green; on the dark oak mantelpiece, which matched the door and wainscoting, stood some "Liberty" vases, which the "Decoration Committee" undertook to keep supplied with flowers. Miss Churchill (the Fourth Form governess) had a large desk on a raised platform, from which she could command a good view of all her pupils at once; behind her hung the baize-covered notice board, and at her right hand stood the black-board on its easel. The windows, of which there were three, were, much to the girls' disgust, guiltless of curtains, as such commodities as carpets and window-hangings were not allowed in the classrooms, a large Oriental rug before the tiled hearth being the only covering on the inlaid floor. But the upper parts of the casement windows were filled in with coloured glass, and on each of the deep window ledges stood a palm, or some hardy fern, in artistic pots, so that the appearance was all that could be desired.

There is just one more thing to be mentioned, and that is, that each class had its own motto, framed, and hung over the mantelpiece, where it could not fail to be seen; that of the Fourth Form being *Suaviter in modo, fortiter in re* (Gentle in manner, resolute in deed).

The mottoes had been Miss Buckingham's gift some few months before,

when the girls, for the time being, in each class had chosen their own, by vote, and the idea was still sufficiently fresh to cause a good deal of interest.

"Now, girls," said Miss Churchill brightly, as she seated herself at her desk, "let us get to work at once. We did really nothing yesterday, what with giving out stationery, and drawing up the timetable, etc.; so this morning we must begin in earnest. Divinity is our first lesson."

She was a plain little person, dressed in a blue serge skirt, and blouse of blue and white striped flannel. Her age might have been anything under forty, but as a matter of fact, Mary Churchill had not yet passed her twenty-eighth birthday. Her soft brown hair, guiltless of fringe or wave, was simply arranged, and her broad forehead was suggestive of talent, while her lips spoke of a resolute will. But beneath the commonplace exterior, there beat a warm loving heart, which took a real vital interest in the character of each of her pupils; and it was because of her love for them that, for the most part, the girls of the Fourth Form were devoted to their teacher.

There was an opening of desks, a rustling of Bibles and notebooks, and then the work of the morning began. The period in Scripture that had been chosen for that term's study was the book of Exodus, and the girls grew quite interested as Miss Churchill graphically described the position of the Israelites in bondage.

Elsa and Amethyst, who shared a double desk between them, listened intently, for they thoroughly enjoyed the Divinity lesson always; but Olive paid scant attention. It was far too dry, she thought, to trouble about listening properly, and so her thoughts wandered, first to one thing, and then to another, until she had quite lost the thread of the lesson, and gave up trying to follow it. So she looked about her, to see what the others were thinking, and found Monica Beauchamp's eyes were fixed on her. She was too far away from her to whisper, as she would undoubtedly have done if she could, so she contented herself with smiling and making various grimaces, to show her feelings, when Miss Churchill was engaged with the blackboard.

Monica, who had felt terribly "out of it" the day before, was only too ready to make advances towards this girl who seemed to have plenty of fun in her, and was not a goody-goody like her sister; so she returned the gesticulations with interest.

For a few minutes Miss Churchill noticed nothing wrong, but presently as she looked round from the blackboard she heard a decided titter, and turning in the direction from which the sound came, she saw that one of the girls, Hetty Warner, a quiet, inoffensive child, was endeavouring to conceal her merriment by means of her handkerchief.

"What are you laughing at, Hetty?" she said, somewhat sternly.

"Nothing, Miss Churchill," muttered the girl, as best she could.

"There must have been some reason, and I insist upon knowing it," and Miss Churchill came a few steps nearer to the culprit's desk. A hasty movement between two of the girls did not escape her, and quick as thought she intercepted a small piece of paper which Olive Franklyn was frantically trying to put out of sight.

The girls held their breath as their teacher opened and smoothed out the paper, which Olive had screwed up into a ball rather than hand it up as it was. Those who had been in the form before remembered a similar occasion when Miss Churchill had confiscated a little scribbled note which was being passed along, and the punishment that had been inflicted for such an underhand trick. But that was as nothing to the present scene, for Miss Churchill held aloft, so that all could see it, the paper on which was an unmistakable caricature of herself, in the attitude she assumed when delivering a lesson.

"What a shame!" cried several of the girls simultaneously, but she stopped them with a motion of her hand.

"Who drew this?" she enquired, in a well-controlled voice; but her eyes flashed, and it was evident that she was very, very angry.

For a moment no one answered, and she put the question again, while the girls waited breathlessly; those who were innocent were eager to know who the culprit was. Only two of them looked at all guilty, and those were the Franklyns. Miss Churchill, looking round at all the faces before her, noticed the frightened look of one, and the off-hand, nonchalant air of the other. As yet she scarcely knew them apart, so she enquired of the one nearest to her, who happened to be Elsa: "Did you draw this ... thing?"

A scarcely audible "No" came from Elsa's trembling lips, and Miss Churchill was about to tell her to speak louder, when Olive stood up, and said, in a bold, defiant tone: "Elsa knows nothing about it, I did it," and then she sat down again calmly, to await her punishment.

"You will apologise to me for your rudeness before you go home, and you will copy out a hundred lines of French translation and bring it to me, to-morrow, without a fault, or else I shall show this drawing to Miss Buckingham," was all the teacher said, in very quiet tones; but for once Olive was subdued, and behaved tolerably well for the rest of the morning.

She was greeted with various remarks during the ten minutes' recreation the girls had in the playground. Some of them looked askance at her, and she felt she had made a bad beginning in the new form. But two or three of the troublesome, fun-loving ones complimented her upon the cleverness of her drawing.

"You hither expression to a T!" said Lily Howell, a somewhat vulgar-looking girl, whose slangy expression jarred upon her superiors, but whose well-filled purse made her a desirable acquaintance.

[image]

"'YOU HIT HER EXPRESSION TO A T!'"

"It wasn't bad," admitted Olive, "but I could have done it a great deal better if I had had time."

"I'm afraid you've done for yourself," said Gipsy Monroe, a dark-eyed girl, with short, curly black hair, as she and Amethyst Drury sauntered by arm in arm.

But, beyond a shrug of her shoulders, Olive took no notice, for all her interest was centred in Monica, who was just coming towards her.

"I say, wasn't it a lark?" was Monica's greeting, as she came near; "but it's hard lines that you should have all the punishment, because I was nearly as bad."

"Oh! I don't care a fig about the copying," said Olive carelessly. "It goes against the grain rather to beg her pardon, but, of course, I shall have to, or there'll be no end of a row, and I only did it for fun."

"Well, you *are* a jolly girl!" was Monica's admiring reply. "I wish you'd be friends with me."

"So I will," agreed Olive, with alacrity. "I haven't got a real chum, and I should think you and I would get on A1."

"I've never had a girl-friend in all my life," said Monica; "to tell the truth I always thought them rather dull and stupid. I am awfully keen on dogs; do you like them?"

And Olive assenting, a lively conversation ensued, which was abruptly terminated by the sound of the bell recalling them to lessons.

Olive's equanimity appeared to be quite restored as she entered the school door with her new-made friend, but a pitiful little look from Elsa, and a whispered, "How *could* you, Ollie?" made her feel most uncomfortable, and she seized an early opportunity of going up to Miss Churchill and expressing the contrition that, at the moment, she really felt, for Olive Franklyn was a good-hearted girl, although she was full of fun, and she began to realise that perhaps Miss Churchill had "feelings" the same as herself, and she knew she wouldn't have liked such a trick played upon her.

Something in the honest brown eyes which looked unflinchingly into her own touched Miss Churchill, who had somewhat recovered from the indignation which Olive's treatment of her had roused, and she spoke gently to the pupil who would doubtless prove a "handful" as time went on.

"Very well, dear, I quite forgive you; let us say no more about it. I don't think you will do such a thing again. You have evidently some talent for sketching

quickly and boldly; see that you do not misuse your gift."

And Olive, glad to be at peace with her teacher again, made a mental vow that she would be an exemplary scholar from that day forward. But alas! Olive Franklyn's promises were, like the proverbial pie-crust, made to be broken!

CHAPTER V.

"I WANT YOU A MINUTE."

Monica Beauchamp returned home from her second day at school in high spirits. At last, she believed, she had found a friend, a girl of about her own age, who apparently had tastes somewhat similar to her own, to whom she could talk without restraint, and to whom she could confide all the hundred and one grievances of her everyday life at her grandmother's.

She felt so light-hearted about it that she even condescended to make an affable remark now and again, during the walk home, to the long-suffering Barnes, whom Mrs. Beauchamp insisted should accompany Miss Monica both to and from school, and who had had a sorry time so far. For Monica was so indignant at the idea of requiring a nurse-maid (as one or two of the girls had not hesitated to call the person whom they saw with Monica) that she had vented her spite on Barnes by marching sullenly along without saying a single word.

Barnes, who was accustomed to all sorts of treatment from "that Miss Monica," as she was wont to call her, confided to the other maids over their dinner that school was working wonders in their young lady already, and she wished she'd gone a good bit before.

"Not as I enjoys the constitootional twice a day," she added, "for I can't abear it, and it takes a sight of time. But still, if the missis will have it so----"

"I'm sure I'd just as lief go out a-walking, as tidy up all the rubbidge in her bedroom," sniffed Mary Ann, the under-housemaid, who privately thought herself far more suited to go than Barnes.

"You never need be expecting to, then," replied the maid, with conviction. "You're far too giddy."

"Dear, dear," was the mocking answer, "old maids isn't always the ones preferred!"

"There, that'll do, Mary Ann!" interposed cook good-temperedly; "don't be rude to Miss Barnes." And she adroitly changed the subject.

Meanwhile, Monica was having a *tête-à-tête* meal with her grandmother in the dining-room upstairs. The old lady had been out the previous afternoon and evening, and so had not had an opportunity of questioning Monica about her first experiences of school life. She proceeded to do so when the parlourmaid left them alone together.

Monica, still happy in the thought of her new-made friend, looked bright and lovable as she sat opposite her grandmother at the lavishly appointed luncheon table; even Mrs. Beauchamp, austere and undemonstrative as she was, felt for the moment a thrill of satisfaction in possessing so handsome a grandchild. But neither her words nor tones gave any indication of such a state of feeling.

"Now give me some account of your school-work, Monica," she said stiffly, as she toyed with a minute helping of orange jelly.

"Oh! I think I shall like it no end," was the girl's off-hand reply, as well as she could between huge mouthfuls of rhubarb tart, which she was discussing with her healthy school-girl's appetite. "It was a bit strange at first, but I chummed up to one of the girls to-day, so I feel quite at home."

"Really, Monica," expostulated her grandmother, "you must not use such expressions; you quite shock me. I do hope they will not allow you to speak improperly at this school." And she sighed voluminously.

"That isn't slang, really, grandmother; everybody says chum nowadays," was Monica's conciliatory reply. "At least, all young people do."

"I do hope you won't grow unladylike, I'm sure. It is doubtful if it was a wise step to send you to such a large school, I am afraid."

"Don't fidget, grandmother," said her grandchild soothingly. "I daresay I shall turn out all right in the end." And she added, mentally: "At any rate, dad, I won't disappoint *you* if I can help it."

"Well, what about this girl you've made friends with?" continued the old lady helplessly; "who is she?"

"One of Dr. Franklyn's daughters," began Monica, but Mrs. Beauchamp interrupted her.

"Oh! I'm glad you had the sense to choose a professional man's child. Although I don't know much of Dr. Franklyn, I think he is a very respectable medical man. But was there no girl in your own station, Monica, who would have been more suited as a companion for you?"

"I'm sure I didn't give a thought to what her father was," said Monica frankly. "I shouldn't have cared much if he had been a chimney sweep. I've taken a great fancy to Olive Franklyn, and she seemed friendly, so we have agreed to be chums."

"Well, I hope you have not been rash. I must make enquiries about these Franklyns before I can allow you to become further acquainted."

Monica muttered something under her breath, which sounded suspiciously

like "What rubbish!" but the look on her grandmother's stern face warned her to be careful, if she would keep her friend.

"I thought Mr. Bertram said the Osmington clergy had daughters at the High School," remarked Mrs. Beauchamp after a pause; "would not one of them have done?"

"I think there's only Amethyst Drury in our form," was the scornful reply, "and I'm sure she's a little prig. She's great friends with Olive's twin sister Elsa, who is just such another as herself, I should think."

Her grandmother inferred from that remark that Monica had evidently chosen a kindred spirit, and she dreaded what might be in store, in the way of added unruliness. But she refrained from saying what was in her mind, and went on to enquire about lessons, and so forth.

Monica gave a very good description of all she had done, with the exception of the caricature episode, and having somewhat ingratiated herself with her grandmother, by repeating a few words of praise that had been bestowed upon her German exercise, she thought it a good opportunity to ask a favour.

"Oh! grandmamma," she said coaxingly, "don't you think I might go without Barnes? It seems so silly for a great girl like me to be obliged to have a maid to walk with me. The girls say nasty things about it, too," she added ruefully.

"I have been considering the matter, Monica," said Mrs. Beauchamp, as she rose from the table, "but I have not decided yet what I shall do."

"Can't I go by myself, grandmother? I'm sure you might trust me."

"I am not so sure, Monica," was the cold rejoinder. "I do not approve of young ladies tearing here, there, and everywhere by themselves, though it may be all very well for girls of the middle classes. I shall probably get a small governess cart, and Richards will drive you in and out."

A drive with the sedate old coachman who had been years in Mrs. Beauchamp's service, and who occasionally "spoke his mind to Miss Monica," was scarcely any improvement on walking with Barnes. But, at any rate, there would be no reason for the girls to ridicule her then. So she made no demur.

"Now, Monica, go to the schoolroom and do some of your lessons, and be ready at half-past-three to accompany me to The Knoll. Put on your cream serge frock, and make yourself as neat-looking as you possibly can, for Mrs. St. Quintin is very particular."

Monica was not over-pleased at the prospect of a longish drive, and drawing-room tea to follow, but even that was preferable to remaining at home alone. So she prepared to do as she was told, and behaved in so exemplary a manner during the rest of the day that Mrs. Beauchamp began to have great hopes from the new educational arrangements.

By the end of the week the governess cart was procured, and Monica was

freed from Barnes's espionage. The girls were quick to see the fresh arrangement, and Lily Howell, who had been the one to talk about the nursemaid, was furiously jealous of the smart little turn-out. Her father, a retired soap-manufacturer, was extremely wealthy, and his only and much spoiled child was most extravagantly dressed; indeed, she had everything for which she expressed a wish. But for some unaccountable reason he would not go in for "hoss-flesh," as he called it, preferring to hire a landau from the livery stables when Mrs. Howell wished to drive; so that Lily's pet ambition, which was to drive herself, was not realised. A bicycle she might, and did, have, but she had tired of that, because it was such a "fag"; so that she was dreadfully annoyed when the new girl, with the uppish ways, passed her on her way to the High School, seated in just such a trap as her soul coveted. She made up her mind to vent her spite somehow upon Monica, who took absolutely no notice of her at all, while she was as "thick as thieves" with that Franklyn girl, whose father was as poor as a church mouse.

Now Lily was a sly, deceitful sort of girl, and was by no means a favourite with the others; but she was in the habit of spending money freely, simply because she wanted to show off; so that some of the more greedy girls made a sort of queen of her, and flattered her tremendously on account of the chocolate, and other good things, which she showered upon them. She was so lazy and indolent that she would have been continually getting into trouble with the governesses, had it not been for her little coterie, who managed, by one trick and another, to shield her from exposure; and somehow she managed to pass muster.

On the morning in question she nursed her jealousy of Monica until recreation time came round, and then she found a splendid opportunity, as she thought, of "paying her out."

The usual visit to the housekeeper's room, where the girls could buy various biscuits, and get milk, if they liked, for lunch, having been paid, some of the Fourth Form girls hurried off to secure one of the two asphalted tennis courts, Monica and Olive being among the number. But when they arrived on the scene, it was only to find that the Fifth Form had appropriated them both, and were practising with a view to a tournament which was to take place between the girls of the Osmington and another High School later on.

"Oh, I say! it's too bad of you girls to take both courts," cried Olive breathlessly.

"First come, first served, my dear," replied one of the elder girls condescendingly, as she returned a serve gaily, but so carelessly, that the ball was netted, and her partner groaned, as the umpire scored "forty--love."

"Well, let's have a game of fives, Monica," suggested Olive, as they left the tennis players. But, alas! the fives courts were all filled by then, so there was no amusement left but to saunter about the large playground arm-in-arm, as several

of the others were doing, some, like themselves, in couples, and some in schoolgirl fashion, in strings of four, or even five.

"What do you do on Saturdays, Olive?" said Monica, as they left the tennis players behind them, and strolled round the quieter part of the playground, that nearest to Miss Buckingham's house.

"Oh! all sorts of things. In the summer we have picnics in Disbrowe woods, and sometimes on the river, when my brothers are home."

"You never told me you had any brothers but Pat," said Monica, in surprise. "Are they older than you?"

"Haven't I? Why, yes--Roger, that's the one at St. Adrian's Hospital, is twenty-two, and Dick is seventeen. He's with an uncle of ours who is an auctioneer. They'll both be home in August, and we can have some lovely picnics then, if Mrs. Beauchamp will let you come."

"I expect I shall have to go to the seaside with her again, like we did last year," was Monica's gloomy reply. "She always goes to Sandyshore for a whole month, because it's quiet and restful, she says. It's a hateful little place, *I* think--no niggers, or band, or anything to amuse you all day long. I do wish we needn't go there this year."

"Oh, dear," sighed Olive lugubriously, "I wish I had half a chance of a month by the dear, darling sea! We are so dreadfully poor that father can never afford a holiday at the seaside for us. At least, we haven't been for years, though we did have a fortnight once, when Elsa and I were about eight or nine, but it is so long ago I can hardly remember it."

"Wouldn't it be awfully jolly if grandmother would let you come with us?" said Monica eagerly.

"If pigs might fly!" was her friend's merry response, as the bell clanging out warned them that "rec." was over.

"Olive Franklyn, I want you a minute."

The girl turned round at the sound of her name, and saw Lily Howell beckoning to her mysteriously from a little distance.

"Whatever does she want? I suppose I must go and see," said Olive, as she slipped her arm out of her companion's. "I'll catch you up in half a minute, Monica."

"All right; I'm glad she doesn't want me. I can't bear that girl."

"Nor I."

Monica went leisurely round the corner towards the entrance the girls generally used; several of them, hurrying past, advised her not to be late.

"I'm just coming," she said, and turned back to look for Olive. There was no one in sight now, except a girl called Maggie Masters, who came flying round the corner in great haste.

"Olive Franklyn told me, if I saw you, to ask you to go back to the tennis courts a minute. It is something particular."

If Monica had been a little more up to school-girls' tricks she would have scented something wrong in the way the girl delivered her message, and then rushed into school. As it was, she hastened back to the tennis courts, only to find the place absolutely deserted, and no trace of Olive anywhere! Feeling sure there was some mischief afloat, Monica retraced her steps hurriedly, determined to find out the originator of the trick. But alas! when she reached the school door it was bolted from within, and rattle at the handle as she would, no one appeared to open it. Growing more angry every minute, she rushed round the playground to the other entrance, only to find that fastened likewise!

Scarcely knowing what to do, Monica was just about to pull the door-bell, when she remembered that the Fourth Form windows were accessible to the playground. She hurried across the small plot of grass, nicknamed "The Square," and by dint of standing on tiptoe could just see into the classroom.

All the girls had taken their places, with the exception of Olive, who was vainly endeavouring to make Fräulein Wespe understand that Monica Beauchamp must have got shut out. But Fräulein, who was a very fresh importation from Germany, either could not, or would not understand, so she merely motioned to Olive to take her place, while she ejaculated "Ach, so!" and smiled benignantly.

A hurried glance round the room revealed to Monica that she had been the victim of a practical joke, for Lily Howell and Maggie Masters, who were seated at a desk just under the open window, were engaged in a whispered conversation about her non-appearance while Fräulein's attention was being taken up with Olive.

"We've put a spoke in her ladyship's wheel, now," whispered Lily, an ugly sneer upon her thin lips.

"Nasty, uppish thing to look down on you, dear!" purred Maggie, who had vivid remembrances of the delicious milk-chocolate she had just been enjoying at Lily's expense.

"I'll be even with them yet," remarked Monica mentally, as she moved to the next window, from which the two conspirators would be unable to see her. Here she rapped loudly on the pane, to attract Fräulein's attention. That lady was, of course, astonished beyond anything to see one of the pupils still out in the playground, and she began to question volubly in German as to the cause of such behaviour, leaving her desk, as she did so, and walking over to the window.

Now it so happened that Monica was not a bad German scholar, for her age, one of her long-suffering governesses having insisted upon German conversations, and Monica had picked up a very fair smattering of the language during her six months' reign. Therefore she made it sufficiently intelligible to Fräulein

that she had been the victim of a practical joke for that worthy to express pity for the girl who would evidently be one of her best pupils, and, in broken English, she bade some one go and unfasten the passage door.

Olive, of course, was the first to run and do her bidding, and in the second or two they were together Monica learnt that Olive had been decoyed into entering the school by the other door, under some pretext or other, Lily Howell having assured her that she had seen Monica go in the usual way a minute before. Neither of the girls could think of any reason for the trick, except that Olive thought it was "just like Lily Howell."

"She'll hear more about it one of these days," said Monica sententiously, as she entered the classroom, with her haughtiest air, and took her place, without deigning even to glance at the conspirators, who were burning with curiosity to know just how much Fräulein had been told, and whether any exposure would follow. But as no further notice was taken of the affair, probably on account of Fräulein Wespe's ignorance of rules, Lily Howell began to feel that her little manoeuvre to get the new girl into disgrace had fallen rather flat!

CHAPTER VI.

"HE WEREN'T CALLED 'SEIZE-'ER' FOR NOTHIN'!"

The following day was Saturday, and therefore a whole holiday. Monica, who had grown quite accustomed to the new life among companions of her own age, felt quite dismal when she rose in the morning, and remembered there were two long, long days to be got through before she could expect to see any of them again. She fully intended asking her grandmother if Olive might come to Carson Rise (as Mrs. Beauchamp's residence was called) to tea, at least, if not to spend the greater part of the day. But Olive had told her of the previous arrangement that she and Elsa should go to the vicarage (an invitation, by the way, which she now wished she had not been so eager to accept!), so that Monica was compelled to give up her plans for that week.

Whether it was that she missed the wholesome control of school *régime*, or whether, to use a common phrase, "she got out of bed the wrong side" that Saturday morning, it would be difficult to say; but at any rate, things went very much wrong.

To begin with, Mrs. Beauchamp was confined to her bed with a feverish

cold, and Barnes came down at breakfast time to say "would Miss Monica please have her breakfast, and then amuse herself as quietly as possible, so that grandmother could get a little sleep, as she had had a very restless night."

Now Monica was not really an unfeeling girl, but being abnormally healthy and vigorous herself, she had scant sympathy with ailing people, and was of opinion that her grandmother coddled herself frightfully. Added to this, she knew that Mrs. Beauchamp had intended driving into Osmington that day, to call on some friends who would be likely to be able to tell her more about the Franklyns, and whether Monica might safely be allowed to mix with them. Now, with this cold, the drive would be impossible, and perhaps several days would elapse before she would get full permission to make a friend of Olive. It certainly *was* vexing; it almost seemed to the disappointed girl as if her grandmother had caught cold on purpose; and Olive had hinted only the day before that perhaps Mrs. Beauchamp would let Monica come to tea, one day, with them, and the lonely girl was longing to have her first glimpse of real home life, and make the acquaintance of the "Pickle," and see the girls' "den."

And, in her chagrin, Monica, with a hasty movement, pushed the hot water jug roughly out of her way, as she reached after the butter dish, with the result that the silver cream jug, which she had carelessly placed near the edge of the table, tipped over, and spilling its contents on the handsome felt carpet, fell with sufficient force to bend the handle, and to make a very nasty dent in its pretty fluted side.

"Oh, horrors!" ejaculated Monica, "there *will* be a row!" and she endeavoured to mop up the cream with her serviette, and tried what she could do with the jug.

"I suppose I must ring for Harriet," she muttered, in despair, as the carpet seemed to get worse under her treatment and the jug certainly no better!

Her hasty ring brought the parlourmaid quickly on the scene, and that worthy held up her hands in horror at the dreadful state of the carpet.

"Oh! Miss Monica," she gasped, "whatever will your grandma say? The carpet will be ruined, you may depend. There'll be a nasty looking stain, however much we get it out. That's the worst of these felts," and she hastened away, to return in a moment with cloths and hot water and various remedies for the mishap.

Harriet went down on her knees and applied them vigorously, but an ugly dark patch remained, and, as she seemed to take great pleasure in reminding poor Monica, "it always would." She turned her attention to the cream jug next, but, of course, could do nothing to remove the dent, or straighten the twisted handle.

"Oh, my!" she said; "your grandma will be vexed, Miss Monica, so partikler as she always is about the silver things, on account of their anticwitty, as she calls it. Well, well!"

Poor Monica! How she ached to box the ears of this Job's comforter; and it

is to be feared the only motive that she had in refraining from doing so, was that she considered it *infra dig.* of a lady to strike a menial! She had not learnt the lesson "that he that ruleth his spirit is better than he that taketh a city." So, merely shrugging her shoulders, she said not one syllable to the retreating parlourmaid, as she departed with her cloths, and the final remark "that it *was* unfortunate, the missis laid up, and all."

Monica finished her interrupted meal in gloomy silence, meditating upon the scene that would be enacted later on, when her grandmother was made aware of the mishap.

Having made a bad start, unfortunately Monica thought it didn't much matter now if she got into more trouble. So after lounging about in the schoolroom for half an hour, and finding nothing to amuse herself with, she decided upon a visit to the stables.

She knew very well that in going there she was acting in defiance of her grandmother's expressed wish; but the spirit of insubordination had seized hold of Monica, and she felt absolutely reckless. Old Richards was nowhere to be seen, so she proceeded to enjoy herself thoroughly, by visiting "Belle" and "Beauty," the handsome pair of greys in their loose boxes, and then passed on to inspect the new pony "Cæsar," who was fastened in his stall.

She had just leaned over the door, the upper half of which was open, when she espied Tom, the stable-boy, in the harness-room beyond, busy over polishing the harness, and humming a tune.

"Mornin', miss," he grinned, as he touched his ragged cap with delight, and went on with his work with extra briskness. He was a bright little chap of fourteen, only recently introduced into the Carson Rise stables, and he appreciated to the full the magnificent opportunity of "getting on" that the situation afforded.

For Tom White meant to "get on" to the very best of his ability; and even Richards, who was rather grudging of praise, could find no fault in the little lad, who was as willing as willing could be, and took the greatest possible pains over all his jobs.

"Is the new pony all right, Tom?" queried Monica, as she stood looking admiringly at Cæsar, as he pawed the ground impatiently, and tossed his silky brown mane. "Will he let me pat him?"

"Better not, miss," suggested Tom, with an elderly air, which sat comically upon his young shoulders. "Mr. Richards, he said this mornin' that he thought he were a bit of a tartar, miss." And Tom put down a piece of harness with evident pride in the high state of polish which his efforts had produced. He was just going to attack another vigorously, when Monica bade him come and unfasten the pony, so that she could see his head better.

"Please, miss, I'd rather not." And Tom came slowly out of the harness-room,

but made no effort to do as Monica said.

"Why not, pray? You surely aren't afraid he'll bite you?" said Monica sharply. She had an intense scorn for those who were afraid. "You'll never be any good for a coachman if you're afraid of a *pony*." And her proud young face expressed disgust.

"Please, miss, 'tisn't that a bit," said the boy, his big grey eyes upraised to hers pleadingly; for he was devoted to Miss Monica. "I ain't a mite afraid of 'im, but Mr. Richards 'e said, said 'e: 'Now, Tom, you leave that there pony alone,' says 'e. 'If 'e don't bite, if 'e gits a chance, my name ain't Richards. You may depend,' says 'e, ''e weren't called "Seize-'er" for nothin'.'"

"Nonsense!" said Monica, scornfully, although she was tickled with the man's unconscious pun. "You wouldn't bite me, would you, old boy?" she added to the little chestnut, who eyed her rather maliciously as she entered the stall, and put out her hand to rub his soft brown nose.

"Oh, don't, miss, please don't!" cried the little stable-boy, as he tried to snatch her hand away. But even as he spoke the pony made a grab at the girlish fingers, and Monica realised too late that she would have been wiser to pay attention to the boy's warning, for her hand ached terribly, and there were ugly tooth marks on the palm and one or two fingers.

"You little wretch! You horrid little vixen!" she cried, in pain and anger, as she bound her hand, fortunately the left one, in her handkerchief, and tried to still the throbbing.

The pony, quiet enough now, appeared to take no notice of the epithets she poured out upon him, and Tom stood helplessly by, his very soul in his liquid grey eyes, wishing with all his heart, poor little chap, that it had happened to him instead of to his adored young lady.

"Please, miss," he suggested timidly, "'adn't you better go indoors, and get something to do your 'and good. Shall I run round to the kitchen and tell 'em?"

Monica blessed the warm-hearted little lad for his evident desire to make matters a little easier for her indoors, and gladly assented to his plan.

She was thankful when she reached the house that she was saved the effort of telling what had happened, for she felt a curious sensation all over her, and was seized with a desire to fall into the first chair she came to. Surely she was not going to faint? Monica Beauchamp had never been known to have nerves before!

"Mercy on us, Miss Monica, you do look bad!" cried the kindly old cook, as she called to one of the maids for a glass of water, and sent another for the vinegar bottle. "La, what a nasty grip the little beast give you!" she added, as the handkerchief fell off, and revealed the extent of the damage. "Get a bowl of warm water, Mary Ann, quick!" And in another minute she was gently bathing the injured hand in the water, to which she had added a little Condy's fluid.

"Is that better, miss?" she asked, with kindly sympathy, glad to notice that the colour was returning to Monica's cheeks. She was, perhaps, the only one of all the servants who had any affection for the girl whose coming had upset the even tenor of the quiet household, and whose pranks gave them so much extra trouble.

"Oh! yes, thanks, cook, it doesn't ache quite so horribly now," she said, with a sigh of relief, as the woman bound the hand up in some soft old linen, and Monica prepared to leave the kitchen regions. But when she let her hand fall for a moment, a stifled groan escaped her lips, and she raised it quickly.

"Let me make a sling of this old scarf, Miss Monica," said cook, suiting the action to the word, and hastily improvising a sling from a black and white check tie, which she produced from one of the huge dresser drawers. "It's a mercy the skin ain't broke."

"Thanks," was all Monica could manage to say, for it required all her self-control to keep her lips firmly clenched, the aching was so intense.

"Perhaps Barnes could find some soothin' stuff to put on it, miss," she called after the girl, as she slowly ascended the kitchen stairs.

Monica managed to reach the schoolroom door, where she came face to face with Barnes, who had been in search of her; and she had to tell the maid what had befallen her.

"Dear, dear, Miss Monica," said Barnes, "'tis nothing but a chapter of accidents this morning; the missis so poorly, too. But there, 'tis one consolation the doctor will be here in a few minutes to see her (for she told me I'd better send for him), and he'll soon put your hand to rights."

She spoke more cheerfully than she felt, for Monica looked very unlike her usual self, and she feared she was going to be ill. "Just you have a bit of rest in this easy chair, miss," she said, pushing forward a cosy basket chair, and Monica sank among the cushions with relief. "Why, there's the doctor's gig, I do declare," added the maid, with satisfaction, as wheels sounded on the carriage drive.

The fatherly old doctor, who knew Monica very well, although she had seldom required any of his physic, paid her a visit after he had attended to her grandmother. He examined the bite carefully, and commiserated with her on the unfortunate mishap, but said it was not at all a serious matter. He promised to send some lotion, and told her to keep her hand in a sling, and he hoped in a day or two there would be little more than bruises left.

"But you mustn't go and put your hand into the pony's mouth again, my dear child," said he with a smile, "or you might not get off so easily again. I can't quite understand how it happened yet."

"Oh! it was all my own fault," admitted Monica, frankly. "I was warned that the pony might bite, but, of course, I didn't think he would! In fact, I ought not to

have gone into the stables at all." And she looked up saucily into the kind old face bending over her. But the expression in the keen eyes which looked searchingly at her made her lower her own, while something akin to shame filled her heart.

"I suspect the colonel would say that obedience was one of the first duties of a recruit," he said, slowly; "at any rate, it is one of the hardest lessons that a soldier of the King of kings has to learn. My lassie," he added, tenderly, but solemnly, as he smoothed her ruffled hair with a fatherly touch, "how much longer are you going on fighting against Him? Why don't you surrender arms, and begin to fight for Him, and with Him? You see, I know that I am talking to a soldier's daughter. Won't you think about what I have said?" And he took up his hat and gloves, preparatory to departing.

Monica, remembering her father's last letter, thought how strange it was that the old doctor should speak in the same strain, but she was too shy to mention it, and Dr. Marley feeling that, at any rate, the seed had been sown in the rebellious young heart, forbore to say more. But as he drove on to his next patient he prayed that it might take root; for the old doctor had known Colonel Beauchamp since he was a little lad, and he took a warm interest in his only child.

Monica passed a bad five minutes in her grandmother's room after the doctor had gone, but the influence of his words remained with her, and she refrained from being saucy or off-hand. Indeed, Mrs. Beauchamp began to fear that the accident had made her really ill, so wonderfully subdued and penitent was she.

Considering that she would have to bear the pain and inconvenience of her injured hand for some little time, the old lady excused Monica from further punishment, on condition that she did not disobey again. Fully intending at the moment to keep her promise, Monica said she would remember her grandmother's wishes in future, and the latter dismissed her, feeling more hopeful about her grandchild than she had done for a long time.

As she did not feel up to any great exertion, Monica spent the greater part of the afternoon and evening in writing a long letter to her father, telling him, in detail, all about her new school, and, above all, about her new-found friend. She also described the happenings of that unfortunate morning, taking care not to spare herself in the least; but she felt too shy to say much in reply to his letter, the only remark she made being: "I have been thinking about what you wrote, dad dear, and I mean to try and learn the hard lesson, but I haven't found a teacher yet." And when the father read the girlish, blotted, and rather badly spelt letter, some weeks later, in far off Simla, the tears rose to his eyes, while he bowed his head and prayed that God would send some one to guide his little daughter into the only safe path.

While Monica was engaged in writing her letter, Amethyst Drury was busy playing hostess to the two Franklyns. It was such a lovely sunny afternoon that

Mrs. Drury had given permission for the trio to have tea in the little rustic summer-house overlooking the pretty, but by no means large, lawn.

"Isn't it fun having tea out here?" remarked Amethyst, as the three girls sat lazily in the garden chairs, having done ample justice to the cocoanut cake and raspberry jam sandwiches, which had been provided for the feast by kind Mrs. Drury.

"Awfully nice," admitted Olive, "but I must say I wish Monica could have been here too."

"Oh! Ollie," said Elsa, hastily, with an apologetic glance at Amethyst, for she feared she would think her sister rude.

Amethyst's eyes flashed, and she burst out indignantly: "I can't bear that girl! She's going to spoil everything, and we had such lovely times together before she came." And her lips trembled, and in a minute more there would have been an April shower. But Elsa the peacemaker interposed.

Putting her arm lovingly round the little hostess, she said, soothingly: "Olive didn't mean anything unkind, dear, I am sure. And I don't think Monica will make much difference, because, you see, she lives so far away. And besides, if Olive and Monica become great friends, that leaves me out in the cold; and I want you, Thistle."

"Of course," added Olive. "You two are cut out for each other, and I always feel like a fish out of water amongst you. But let's have a game now, shall we?"

And in the intricacies of playing croquet-golf, as best they could, all against all, the little unpleasantness blew over.

CHAPTER VII.

"THIS IS MONICA BEAUCHAMP, MOTHER."

But Amethyst remembered it again, later on, as she was preparing to get into her little white bed, after the Saturday night bathing operations were over. Mrs. Drury was with her, brushing out the soft fair hair, and plaiting it up into a smooth pigtail.

"Mumsie," she said suddenly, twisting herself round, so that the bow Mrs. Drury was tying nearly slipped out of her hand, and she bade the child keep still a moment longer.

"Now, what is it, girlie?"

"Oh, mumsie, I do *wish* Monica Beauchamp had never been born!" Amethyst brought out the words with such vehemence, that for the moment her mother was too astonished to reply.

"I do, mumsie," repeated the child vehemently.

"Amethyst, I am ashamed of you," said her mother sternly. "I cannot understand what you mean. I don't think you quite know what you are saying."

"I do mean it, really, mumsie, but I daresay it's wicked of me. Only I know she's going to spoil everything, and Olive doesn't care a bit about me now; all she wants is Monica." And Amethyst repeated what Olive had said that afternoon. But if she expected her mother to take her part, she was disappointed.

"I am afraid my girlie is jealous of this new rival," she said, gently, as she drew the little night-gowned figure on to her knee. "You must not expect to be first always, Amethyst. You have had very happy times with the Franklyns, and I have been very pleased for them to make up a little of what you miss by having no sisters. But Olive, especially, seems older than you, and I do not at all wonder at her making this new friend, and I only hope that they will help each other to be good girls. And, surely, Amethyst, if you have Elsa left, you ought to be content. I do not know a nicer, dearer girl than Elsa, anywhere. I am really very glad that it is she who is left to you. It might be very sad if *she* forsook you for some one else, but I don't think Elsa Franklyn would do that."

"No, I'm sure she wouldn't, mumsie," cried the warm-hearted little girl; "she is a dear old darling, and, as you say, so long as I have her it doesn't matter so much about Olive. All the same, I wish that Monica had never come to our school."

"I am afraid you have already forgotten the passage you have been learning this evening, for your Sunday class to-morrow," said her mother, somewhat sadly.

And Amethyst hung her head in confusion, for the verses she had been saying over and over, not an hour before, were those of that beautiful chapter in the first epistle to the Corinthians, where the Apostle says: "Without charity, I am nothing."

"I forgot, mumsie," she murmured.

"Yes, dear; alas! we all forget so soon. Shall we kneel down together now, darling, and ask our loving Heavenly Father to root up this little weed of jealousy, and sow instead the seed of unselfish love; not only for those we have a natural affection for, but love even for our enemy if we had one."

Amethyst Drury often looked back to that Saturday night, and her mother's prayer, in the days and weeks that followed; and the memory of it helped her to overcome her feeling of aversion towards the girl who had, to a large extent, usurped her place.

Monica's hand was sufficiently better by the following Monday to allow of her going to school; but the sling which the doctor insisted upon her using excited

so many remarks that she wished she had not gone. She put off the girls, as long as she could, but at last, in sheer desperation, she told them exactly what had happened.

Her explanation was received in varied ways. One or two of the well-behaved girls looked askance at such insubordination, and lost interest in the result of pure disobedience; but several of the more reckless-minded, Olive among the number, exclaimed at the severity of old Mrs. Beauchamp in forbidding her to go in the stable-yard.

"Catch me keeping that rule," cried one.

"Or me either," said another. "Why, I should just like to see my father trying to stop me visiting the dog-kennels, and petting our old grey pony."

"I suppose my grandmother has a perfect right to do as she likes in her own house?" said Monica haughtily, and the girls muttered, "Oh, yes, of course," in confusion, scarcely knowing what to make of this very peculiar girl.

The days passed swiftly on, without much incident to mark them, until another Saturday drew near, and Monica, happy in her grandmother's permission to be as friendly as occasion necessitated with the Franklyns, realised that on that afternoon she was going to have her first peep into the home life of a big houseful of young people.

A nicely worded note from Olive's mother asking Mrs. Beauchamp to allow her granddaughter to spend from three to seven with her girls had been graciously answered in the affirmative by the old lady, who, though she thought it right to be very stern with Monica, was really anxious for the girl to mix with other young people. So she arranged to drive in the direction of Osmington that afternoon, and drop Monica at the Franklyns' door.

Monica, who was tremendously excited at what was really a great event in her life, tried her utmost to pay attention to the old lady's advice, as they bowled along in the handsome victoria.

"Very well, grandmother, I will be sure to remember," she replied dutifully, to some injunction of Mrs. Beauchamp's, and she looked so good and well-behaved that the old lady's heart quite warmed towards this troublesome, but wonderfully taking, granddaughter of hers.

For Monica looked extremely well in a new coat and skirt of the darkest shade of blue, which, being unfastened, showed a pretty delaine blouse, with a suggestion of pink among its colourings; while the French sailor hat, simply trimmed with a huge rosette of dark blue, exactly suited her bright young face. It was very seldom that the girl troubled about her personal appearance: her usual cry being that "it was too much fag" to make herself look nice, but on this occasion she had been quite ready to fall in with her grandmother's wish that she should dress herself suitably.

"Here we are, grandmamma," said Monica, as the victoria pulled up at the iron gates over which the regulation doctor's lamp was swinging, and in a moment more she was on the pavement.

"Now, Monica, remember, you are on no account to be late in getting ready to come home. Richards will be here punctually at seven, and you must be sure not to keep the pony standing."

"Very well, grandmother." Monica could see a well-known face at one of the windows, so she was eager to be off, and promised readily. Her hand was on the iron gate, when her grandmother's voice recalled her.

"Oh! and, Monica----"

Very reluctantly she turned back, and the face under the upturned hat-brim did not look quite so fascinating, with the expression of vexation it had assumed at the delay.

"Please to remember that you are my granddaughter, and behave yourself as such."

Fortunately, the horses grew restive and made a jerk forward, before Monica's pettish exclamation, "I never get a chance to forget it!" reached Mrs. Beauchamp's ears, or that lady would have had her return drive disturbed by the thought of her grandchild's ingratitude.

The little cloud soon disappeared from Monica's brow, and her face was all smiles again as she received a boisterous welcome from her "chum."

"It is jolly to have you, Monica!"

"It's ever so much more jolly to come, then!"

And the two girls laughed gaily, in their buoyancy of spirit.

"Come up and take your things off first, and then you shall investigate our 'den' and all its treasures," suggested Olive, as the two girls ascended the staircase, arm-in-arm. As they went up, Olive pointed out the various rooms, lowering her voice as they passed her mother's closed door.

"Mother wants to see you ever so much, Monica, but she always has to rest in the afternoon, so I am to take you to her room later on. This is our room--Elsa's and mine," she continued, as they crossed the wide landing, and entered a half-open door. "It's not very big, so we keep most of our property upstairs."

If Monica thought she had never been in such a small, poorly furnished room before, she made no outward sign. Two small beds, a simple wash-stand, and chest of drawers (which also did duty as toilet table), a couple of chairs, and an impromptu wardrobe made by a shelf and some cretonne curtains, was all the furniture the room contained. How vastly different was it from the elegant apartment she called her own at Carson Rise!

Her hat and coat were off in a moment, and then the two friends climbed another flight of stairs, and the "den" was reached.

"Now, isn't it a dear old place?" cried Olive, enthusiastically, as she showed her friend into every nook and corner of the queer L-shaped room, and Monica warmly agreed with her.

"What do you use it for, and who does it belong to?"

"Oh! it really used to be shared by the whole family, and when the boys lived at home, and went to Osmington College, we had gay old times up here, between us. But now they are away, and as Lois has so much to do about the house, and Kath looks after mother, it pretty well belongs to Elsa and me."

"Oh! by the way, where is Elsa?" asked the visitor, suddenly remembering her existence.

"She took the two little ones out for a walk. Funny of her not to want to be in when you were coming, wasn't it?"

And Olive flung her arm round her friend, and hugged her impetuously.

It never so much as entered Olive's head that her twin sister had unselfishly absented herself on purpose, so that she might have the satisfaction and pleasure of having her friend all to herself for a little while. It had not been exactly easy for Elsa, either, to suggest that she should take the little ones with her, and go on an errand that needed to be done, for she, too, was very much attracted by the winsomeness of this new schoolfellow, although Monica's many faults repelled her at times; in fact, a year before, Elsa Franklyn would not have troubled a bit about it, she would have sought to please herself first, whatever the circumstances might be. But now, she was wont to ask herself on occasions like these: "What would Jesus do if He were in my place just now?" and the answer coming back, very distinctly, she sought by His help to act as she felt convinced He would.

Olive, self-seeking, self-loving Olive, often wondered at various little sacrifices, quietly and unostentatiously made, but accepted them without demur, stifling her conscience, which accused her very plainly, by persuading herself that Elsa was such a "mouse" she really didn't care about things a bit, so it was no sacrifice to her.

The two girls perched themselves on the high window seat whence they could see the river gliding swiftly by the bottom of the large, old-fashioned garden, and indulged in a long, long "confab," as Olive termed it, after the newly painted things (which had caused such disaster to Olive's dress) had been admired among many other things.

At length, when each had confided to the other all that was in her heart, a sound of youthful voices was heard in the hall below, and in a few moments more, Elsa appeared on the scene.

"Where are Joan and Pat?" said Olive, as Monica and Elsa greeted each other with the school-girl's typical "How d'you do?"

"They went to Nanny."

"Because Monica wants to see Paddy. Go and fetch him up, Elsa, there's a good girl."

"Mayn't Joan come, too?" pleaded Elsa; "she wants to, ever so much."

"Oh, yes!" said Olive, with good-humoured benignity; "let her come if she likes. But Monica doesn't care for small girls."

"I really don't know anything about children," said Monica, as Elsa went off at Olive's request.

"Well, I think, myself, that they are a perfect nuisance," admitted her friend; "they are always in the way, or getting into mischief, but Paddy is such a jolly little chap, everybody takes a fancy to him."

And as soon as Monica saw him, she added yet another to the number of those whom Master Pat, the Pickle, had slain with the sword of his fascinations. He came peeping in the door, demurely twisting his clean holland overall in restless little fingers, as he looked shyly out of his lovely blue eyes at the tall girl who had not the least idea of what to say to "small fry."

"Come here, little man," she ventured somewhat stiffly at length, holding out a hand to him.

"Don't fink I will, big girl," was the unexpected reply, which sent them off into roars of laughter. Paddy, perceiving he had said something comical, laughed gleefully, and added, drolly: "Aren't I a pickle?" which, of course, amused them all the more.

The laugh set them all at their ease, and a happy half-hour was spent over one thing and another; Joan sitting quietly looking on, while her little brother received most of the attention. Monica had to be told of some of Paddy's escapades--how once he had got hold of the garden hose, and hiding behind some shrubs, had squirted the water all over Nanny, who was searching everywhere for him. And how another time father had come in one evening to find a stream of water running out at the front door, and they found the mischievous little boy had turned the bathroom tap on, and left it, and the bath overflowing; the water, of course, was running like a river down the stairs and through the hall!

"Paddy *was* whipped that night," interpolated Joan solemnly, and Pat added innocently, "Yes, *naughty* Paddy; but you can't 'spect no better of a 'pickle.'"

The tea-bell rang before they could have imagined it was time for that meal, and Monica, who was really somewhat shy of strangers, had to make the acquaintance of the twins' elder sisters. But Lois' kindly courtesy and Kathleen's merry chatter soon made her feel quite at home amongst them. The doctor, too, came in just as they had begun tea, the result of Olive's persistent pleading that he would be sure to be early so as to see her "dear Monica," and as he exerted himself to help entertain the young guest a sigh of regret rose to the latter's lips when the happy, homely meal was over.

A stroll round the old-fashioned garden with Olive and Elsa included a visit to the rabbit-hutch and dovecot, and ended with a splendid swing; the twins, who were by no means novices at swinging, being really frightened at the height to which Monica worked herself up. But she knew no fear, and rather enjoyed seeing the anxiety which Elsa evinced every time the ropes creaked uneasily.

"Oh, do go lower, Monica!" she pleaded; but the wayward girl only laughed. Even Olive tried to dissuade her from going so recklessly high, but Monica showed no sign of lessening her speed, and would doubtless have eventually overbalanced herself, had not little Joan run out to say that her mother was ready to see Monica now.

With a merry laugh the girl slowed down, and finally dropped from the seat and catching hold of Olive, said mischievously: "Were you afraid you would have to pick up a bundle of broken bones? I am sure Dr. Franklyn would have liked mending them up again!"

"Oh, don't, Monica!" was all Olive said, but her silence and Elsa's still scared-looking face, made Monica realise that she had gone a little too far, and she felt somewhat subdued as they retraced their steps to the house.

Kathleen came out of her mother's room as the girls tapped at the door.

"Mother is very anxious to see your friend, Olive," she said, with a bright little smile; "she is feeling fairly well to-day."

Monica was seized with a sudden fit of intense shyness, and would gladly have escaped the ordeal, but Olive, never dreaming that her haughty young friend was troubled with any such thing as nervousness, pushed her forward as the door closed after Kathleen's retreating figure, saying: "This is Monica Beauchamp, mother."

And Monica looking straight before her, saw a pale, gentle face, with large luminous eyes, and heard a sweet, soft voice murmuring words of welcome, while the thin white hands clasped her strong young ones, and drew her proud young head down low enough for the invalid to print a loving motherly kiss upon the frank, open brow.

"You do not mind, dear?" said Mrs. Franklyn gently, as she scanned the face of Olive's new friend with eager intensity. "If you are Olive's friend, you must be mine, too."

And Monica murmured something to the effect that she would like to be.

A few minutes were spent in pleasant chatter, about the school, and one thing and another, and Mrs. Franklyn, reading between the lines, got a very good insight into the character of Olive's friend. "A girl with wonderful possibilities before her," she thought to herself, "but----" The unfinished sentence ended in a sigh, for she was thinking of this stranger's influence over her little girl.

Meanwhile Olive was showing the photographs of all the brothers and sis-

ters, which made quite a picture gallery of the mantelpiece; but remembering yet another of her two brothers, taken together, which was in the drawing-room, she ran off to get it, saying: "Monica must see that one, mother; take care of each other until I come back."

The door had no sooner closed after Olive than Mrs. Franklyn, turning to the girl who was sitting beside her couch, said, in the tenderest of tones, "My child, are you a Christian?"

Monica started with astonishment, for she had no idea the Franklyns were what she called "religious," and scarcely knew what to answer, but the kind, motherly eyes seemed to read her very thoughts, and she felt constrained to reply as she did.

"No,--I am not. But my father wants me to be."

"Then, oh! my child, why don't you?"

"I don't think I want to be one," said Monica, slowly; "at least, not yet."

"Don't put it off, childie; life is very short. If you know the way----"

"But I don't," interrupted Monica; "that's just what I don't know. Perhaps if I knew how to set about it I might be one."

"The Lord Jesus----" began Mrs. Franklyn.

But, alas! Olive came bursting into the room, and the precious opportunity had gone. The invalid could only whisper: "Read the 3rd chapter of St. John, and ask God to show you the way, dear child," when, a few moments later, Monica bent over her to say, "Good-bye."

And Monica said she would. But, alas! she put the thought aside that night, thinking Sunday afternoon would be a good opportunity for reading the chapter; and when the next day came she was deep in the pages of a fascinating book, and had completely forgotten her promise to Mrs. Franklyn.

CHAPTER VIII.

"MIND YOU ARE NOT LATE!"

The days and weeks passed quickly at school, once the new term's work was well begun, and the half-term holiday was drawing near.

Monica had never forgotten Lily Howell's trick to get her into trouble, but she felt above paying her out, so she left her severely alone. As it happened, that was perhaps the most trying punishment she could have devised for a girl

of Lily's disposition, who ardently longed to be "taken up" by people such as the Beauchamps, whom her father called "The Quality"; and Monica's absolute indifference to her piqued her terribly.

Lily was telling her mother about it one day, and complaining of being sent to Coventry by "that Monica Beauchamp, who gives herself such airs, just for all the world as if she was a duchess!"

Mrs. Howell, a kindly creature of ample proportions, who always felt impelled to address her magnificent housekeeper as "ma'am," and who never ceased to wish for the happy olden days when first she had married Bob Howell, and kept house on little less than a pound a week, sighed feebly as she looked helplessly at her young daughter, who tyrannised frightfully over her "Ma," as she called her.

"Well, I'm sure, my dear," she ventured, "you might be content with havin' such nice young ladies as the Miss Masters to make friends of, without 'ankerin' after the gentry."

"I do wish you wouldn't leave out all your 'g's,' ma," cried Lily, pettishly; "it's dreadful the way you talk. And as for the Masters, they're only butchers, and I detest being mixed up with shop people." And the girl stamped her foot in disgust.

Mrs. Howell, who was shedding a quiet tear or two over her child's unkindness, sniffed loudly, and said: "I'm sure shop people is plenty good enough for girls as behaves to their poor ma like you do, and I don't wonder as this Miss Beauchamp don't take up with you. I wish to goodness your pa had never made a fortune, that I do; for it's a worry from mornin' to night, a-mindin' my manners here, and a-shuttin' up my mouth there!" And the poor, lonely woman, surrounded with every luxury and elegance that money could buy, but who felt less free than a canary in its cage, wept silently.

For a minute, Lily regarded her with some sort of compunction, but she was afraid of giving way to her better nature, so merely saying: "Well, I'm sure, ma, there's nothing to cry about," turned on her heel, and left the room.

And the poor mother, who had strained every nerve, in her younger days, to make her only child's life one of cloudless happiness, realised that she and her husband had made a bitter mistake in educating Lily "as a lady," for it was only too evident that she now considered herself immensely superior to her parents; and as for affection for them she had little or none.

There was little talked of at the High School that second week in June but the approaching half-term holiday, and various ways of spending it. Some of the girls, whose homes were at a distance, but who either lived or boarded with friends in Osmington, so as to attend the High School, were looking forward to a week-end at home; while others were going to stay from the Friday to Monday night with relations.

Monica and Olive had discussed several plans for spending the long-looked-

forward-to holiday, each of which was delightful in its own way. But eventually, with Mrs. Beauchamp's consent, it was decided that the first part of the day should be spent picnic-fashion, the girls returning to a substantial tea at Carson Rise.

Monica would have preferred having Olive only to spend a long day with her, but Mrs. Beauchamp, who had made the acquaintance of the Franklyn twins, and had taken a great fancy to quiet, nicely behaved Elsa, stipulated that if one sister came, both did; so as Monica said: "To make it all square, let's have Amethyst Drury as well."

Accordingly, on the most perfect of sunny June mornings the quartette having met at a given spot at eleven o'clock made their way to a favourite place in Disbrowe woods, and prepared to enjoy themselves to the full.

The same river which ran past the bottom of the Franklyns' garden, a mile away, flowed through the pretty little copse which enjoyed the above grand cognomen, because it was included in the Disbrowe estate, and the few acres of cherished copse seemed like "woods" in that suburban neighbourhood. It was in this copse that the Osmington people gathered their spring flowers, for the ground was carpeted with primroses during the month of April; and here, too, the boys and girls went nutting in the autumn.

But in June there was nothing to gather, so the girls who had brought well-filled lunch baskets and books with which to while away the time, gave themselves up to what Olive called "a thorough laze."

Seating themselves in characteristic fashion, Monica and Olive up amongst the low-spreading branches of an old oak, while Amethyst and Elsa chose the grassy hillocks caused by its roots, the quartette soon opened their baskets, and the contents disappeared with startling rapidity. As Monica said, "the river smelt quite sea-i-fied," and gave them an extra good appetite; indeed, if it had not been for Elsa, poor Hero, the collie, who Mrs. Beauchamp had suggested should accompany the girls for protection's sake, would have fared badly.

However, he managed to make a very good meal, and was lying down fast asleep in the shade, while the girls, whose tongues had grown tired with talking, were either reading, or lying curled up half asleep on the grassy slope, gazing dreamily at the river, as it flowed smoothly and silently on, when they were all aroused by a short sharp bark, followed by a low growl, and Hero had bounded up the slope to a path which ran along at the top, and which was one of the least frequented paths in the wood.

"Whatever can he see?" cried Monica; "a rabbit, I expect."

"Oh, call him back, Monica, do! Perhaps he will do some mischief," said Elsa.

"Nonsense! He's only chasing a rabbit or a bird."

But even as she spoke there came the sound of feeble crying, as of some one in trouble, and all four girls dropped their books, and ran swiftly up the in-

cline. Arrived there they found Hero, who was still growling at intervals, sniffing suspiciously at a large bundle, done up in a red cotton handkerchief, which was lying on the path: and a few steps away, a poor old body, in a quaint poke bonnet and black shawl, was holding herself up with one hand on the limb of an ash tree, while her other, all knotted with rheumatism, was grasping a stout walking-stick.

Her gown bore traces of Hero's paws, and it was evident from her panting and half-sobbing breath that she had been very much upset.

As the girls drew near she raised her stick and shook it at the dog, crying, "Oh, the beast, the beast, the wicked beast!" while Monica caught hold of Hero by his collar and dragged him away from the bundle which had great attractions for him.

The situation was not without its comical side, and Olive and Monica, seeing no tragedy in it, both began to titter quite audibly.

"Ah, you may laugh; mebbe 'tis nothin' but sport to young leddies like you," cried the little old woman, as she glanced angrily at them. "But 'tis a sorry thing for me; I'm fair shattered wi' fright."

[image]

"'AH, YOU MAY LAUGH; MEBBE 'TIS NOTHIN' BUT SPORT TO YOUNG LEDDIES LIKE YOU.'"

"Poor old thing!" whispered Amethyst to Elsa; "see how she is shuddering still. I should have been afraid of Hero myself, if he had suddenly bounced upon me."

"Yes," was all Elsa said, and the next moment she had slipped up to the old woman, and with a pitiful look in her eyes had taken one of the knotted, wrinkled hands in her own, while she said gently: "We are very sorry, really we are. We wouldn't have let Hero frighten you for anything, if we had known you were here. But people hardly ever come along this path."

"Ah! little lady, you've got a kind heart, I can see," said the old granny, as she looked up into the bright, young face, which evinced real sympathy for her; "not like them two yonder, a-makin' sport o' an old body like me. They'll be rewarded one of these days, though."

She clutched her stick tightly and prepared to pick up her bundle; but Amethyst stooped for her and gave it to her with a smile.

"Thank you, my pretty dear. God bless you both for helpin' me. And now I'll get on a bit, if that there beast 'll let me." But even as she spoke, she tottered and would have fallen, but for a helping-hand from Elsa.

"'Tis the rheumatizzy, missy; it ketches me all of a heap like, nows and thens."

"Let us go a little way with her, Thistle," suggested Elsa, and Amethyst agreed readily, although their companions tried to persuade them not to go.

"Whereabouts are you going?" asked Elsa.

"To my darter's, missy; Joe Hodges' wife she be as lives over agin Disbrowe House."

"Oh! I know Mrs. Hodges, Elsa," cried Amethyst; "she comes to the mothers' meeting. Her husband works for Sir Tudor Disbrowe."

"So he do, missy, and they has a cottage on the estate, so they've a-told me. But I be a stranger to these parts, and I must have mistook my way a-crossin' the copse. I tried to foller the 'rections they gave me at the station, but I made sure I'd took a wrong turn just as that there animal a-bounced at me."

"It's more than a mile from here to Mrs. Hodges' cottage," said Amethyst, somewhat dubiously. She was not quite sure that her good nature was equal to traversing all that distance with the comical old woman.

"Can you walk so far as that, if we help you, do you think?" asked Elsa.

"Oh, my dear young lady," expostulated Granny Wood (as she was generally called), "I don't like to let you do it. I really don't."

"Oh, we don't mind, do we, Elsa?" said Amethyst, a little grandiloquently. "Just look after our baskets and books till we come back, you girls." This she called out to Monica and Olive, who had retreated to a little distance and were watching the proceedings with amusement and contempt.

"You won't find us here when you get back, you needn't fear," retorted Olive. "It's likely to be a lengthy affair! If you're both determined to go, you'd better take your things with you and meet us at the white gate in West Lane. What is the time now, Monica?"

"Two o'clock," replied the only owner of a watch among the quartette.

"Well, we'll meet you about three o'clock, and mind you are not late."

"All right," called back Amethyst, as the queer little party set off, the old woman supported by Elsa's strong, young arm on one side and her stick in her right hand, while Amethyst carried the handkerchief bundle.

"We shan't wait after half-past three, whatever happens," shouted Monica, "so if you're later than that, go straight to Carson Rise."

"Oh, we shall be there in time," returned Amethyst, and the trio disappeared round a turn in the pathway.

"What a fuss about nothing," said Olive, as the girls returned to their seat by the river, and Monica fastened Hero to the trunk of a tree.

"Yes, perfect twaddle I call it," returned her friend; "but there, if they like to do it, it doesn't matter to us." And she took up the book she had flung down in her hurry, and hunted about for her place. "Babyish sort of story this," she added, as

she turned over the pages, "nothing at all exciting in it. How do you like yours, Olive?"

"Oh, pretty fair; it's rather childish, too, but mother is very particular about what we read; she won't let us girls look at a novel."

"Grandmother never troubles about what I read," said Monica. "I've got some jolly books at home, I'll show them to you after tea. I am reading one now that I wanted to bring out with me, but that little Amethyst's eyes are as sharp as needles, and she might have picked it up. I must lend it to you when I've done. It's an awfully jolly story called A Cruel Fate."

"It sounds nice," said Olive, "but if it's a novel, mother won't let me read it."

"Surely you don't have to show her everything you read?" cried Monica, and there was a suggestion of scorn in her tone, which touched a weak spot in Olive's nature; she could not bear being sneered at.

"Of course not," she replied hastily.

"Well, you shall have it later on."

And then the conversation dropped, and they went on reading.

Meanwhile, the progress that the old granny and and her two young companions made was very slow. The sudden, unexpected appearance of the big dog had really upset her, and she was very shaky and nervous still. By the time half a mile had been traversed, her feeble steps began to flag, and it was only by dint of resting very often, and leaning very heavily upon one or other of the girls, that at length the daughter's cottage was reached.

Elsa and Amethyst were by no means sorry when their task was over. They had not thought it would be such a tedious journey, and they were very glad when they had left the old woman safely ensconced in an armchair by Mrs. Hodges' fireside, while that worthy followed them to the gate, overwhelming them with thanks for their very great kindness to her old mother.

"I'm sure, miss, we never can thank you both enough," she repeated again and again, as she held the little green gate open for them to go through.

"Please don't say any more," replied Elsa, earnestly; "we were very glad to do what we could to help your mother."

And as the two girls hastened off, the words the grateful old woman had repeated reverently, as they bade her "good-bye," rang in Elsa's ears like a benediction: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these ... ye have done it unto ME."

But Amethyst's thoughts were in quite another direction.

"It must be awfully late, Elsa," she said, as they hurried along the quiet road which skirted the copse, and which would bring them eventually to West Lane, where they had arranged to meet the others. "We were ages getting there."

"Yes, I suppose it is," replied Elsa, coming back to the present moment with

a start; "why, now I remember it, the grandfather's clock in Mrs. Hodges' room was nearly three o'clock."

"Good gracious!" cried Amethyst. "I never noticed it; let's hope it was fast. But, anyhow, we shall have a business to reach the white gate in time;" and they quickened their footsteps into a run.

At length the trysting place was reached, and they were glad to find that they were the first on the spot.

"Now we can have a rest and get back our breath," said Amethyst, as they perched themselves on the white gate, and fanned their flushed faces with their straw hats. "Oh, I say, how hot and tired I am!"

"I do wish we knew what the time was," said Elsa, who looked rather worried.

"Yes, it's a great bother not having a watch, but I'm to have one next Christmas, so there's not very much longer to wait;" and Amethyst heaved a little sigh of satisfaction. Then she jumped off the gate and ran into the road, as she heard footsteps approaching, expecting it to be the other two girls, but it was only a nurse pushing a baby in a mail cart.

"Do you think she'd know the time, Elsa?" she said, as she ran back to the gate.

"You might ask her," replied the elder girl.

The next moment Amethyst returned with a look of incredulous horror on her little flushed face.

"It's actually four o'clock, Elsa! What *shall* we do?"

With a spring, Elsa was on the ground beside her, and the two girls gazed at each other in consternation.

"Why, they said they would not wait after half-past three, and they must have gone long before we came, and here we have been waiting ever so long for them. Oh, it is *too* bad!" cried Amethyst, nearly in tears.

"That clock must have been dreadfully slow," said Elsa. "Perhaps it was not even going. But cheer up, Thistle, we can get to Carson Rise in less than half an hour from here, and we shall be in time for tea. It wasn't our fault, dear; we couldn't help it, if we are late."

"I don't half like going by ourselves," said Amethyst, as they hurried along the hot, dusty road towards Mydenham; "you see, I've never been there yet."

"Oh! it will be all right," returned Elsa consolingly. "Mrs. Beauchamp is very kind, really, although Monica thinks she is strict. She will understand when

we explain. I daresay the other two had only just left when we arrived."

CHAPTER IX.

"HAVE A RIDE, MONICA?"

"Oh, dear me!" yawned Monica, as she stretched herself lazily, and shut up her book. "I feel awfully sleepy."

"Have a snooze, then," returned Olive, who was deep in the intricacies of her story; "only just tell me the time first."

"Good gracious!" cried her friend, as she twisted her wristlet round, so as to see the hands of the watch it enclosed; "it's just upon three."

"How the time has flown," said Olive, shutting up her book somewhat reluctantly; "we must be going at once. I expect the other two are at the white gate already."

"Not they," ejaculated Monica, as she unfastened Hero, and put her book in her empty lunch basket. And when, five minutes later, they reached the appointed meeting-place, and no trace of the others was to be seen, she said: "I told you so."

"Well, I suppose we must wait about a bit for them," said Olive, "they can't be many minutes. Let's perch on the gate posts and read a bit." She had only a few pages left, and was anxious to see what became of her heroine. But Monica's story was ended, so she looked about her for some other amusement.

In less than a minute the gay chatter of girls sounded on the still, summer air, and Olive, looking up from her book, said: "There they are."

But Monica, who had gone to reconnoitre, said: "No, it's only some of the High School girls--Gipsy Monroe and her little sisters, with a bicycle."

"Hullo!" they said, as they came up, "what are you up to?"

"Waiting for Elsa Franklyn and Thistle Drury," was Monica's reply. "Seen anything of them?"

"No," replied the dark-haired, dark-eyed girl, rightly nicknamed "Gipsy," instead of the plainer appellation of Emily which she had been given. She was holding a younger girl on the bicycle, who jumped off as she brought it to a stand-still. "Have a ride, Monica?"

Now Monica knew that her grandmother had a great abhorrence of girls riding bicycles, and, indeed, she had expressly forbidden her granddaughter to attempt to mount one. But Monica, in this, as in most things, entirely disagreed

with her grandmother, and felt with the boundless self-confidence of youth that her own opinion was far the best. So without a qualm of conscience, she readily accepted the offer.

"I can't balance myself a bit," she said, as she mounted the machine, while Gipsy held it steady. "I have tried once or twice, but I always wobble frightfully." And her movements proved she was right.

"Oh, I say, how heavy you are!" cried Gipsy, in dismay, as Monica and the bicycle rolled first one way and then the other. "Come and hold her up, Olive."

Things went better then, with two to steady the uncertain rider, and they had gone some little distance along the road, when the Monroe children, who were a little behind, called out: "Look out, here's a motor!" And in another second the car whizzed by them.

They never knew just how it happened; whether Monica overbalanced, or whether she steered purposely into the hedge, so as to avoid the motor, but the next instant the bicycle overturned, and Monica lay all huddled up underneath it.

"Oh! Monica, are you hurt?" cried both girls simultaneously, as they lifted up the bicycle, and stood it against the hedge. But Monica neither moved nor spoke.

"Oh, she's dead!" cried the younger children, as they looked at the inanimate form, lying so still on the dusty road.

"Nonsense!" said a loud, cheery voice beside them, and looking up, startled, the girls saw that the motor had been brought to a standstill not many yards off, and its occupant had come back to see what was the matter. "Not a bit of it! The lass has only twisted her foot a bit, by the look of it, and I expect she's either stunned or fainted. I'll lift her up," and suiting the action to the word, the stranger, whom the girls had recognised as Lily Howell's father, raised Monica gently in his strong arms.

The movement roused Monica, and she opened her eyes, saying with a shudder, "Oh, my foot, my foot!"

"Oh, Monica, Monica!" cried Olive, who was nearly beside herself with fright, and who was terrified when she thought of Mrs. Beauchamp.

"There, that'll do, missy!" interposed Mr. Howell, in his bluff, hearty voice; "just you let me carry her to the car there, and we'll have this foot attended to in a jiffy."

And in another moment Monica was half-lying, half-sitting in the car, supported by Mr. Howell and Olive, whom he had bade get up as well, when he understood they were together; the Monroes following on foot with the bicycle, which had been the innocent cause of the calamity.

"Drive on home, Cobb," said Mr. Howell to his chauffeur; while he added to Olive, "It's the nearest place, and we shall soon see how much damage is done."

"Oh, she's fainted again!" cried poor Olive, as Monica's head fell helplessly against the broad shoulder which was supporting it.

"By Jove! she has," ejaculated the man under his breath, and he noticed with relief that another minute would see them at his door.

It was the work of a very few moments to carry the injured girl into the house, and lay her gently on a huge couch, which was placed under an open window in one of the expensively furnished rooms. The next thing was to remove the shoe from the fast-swelling foot, to find Mrs. Howell, and send for the doctor.

"Franklyn is nearest," said the plutocrat to a smartly liveried footman, who waited for orders. "Get him to come at once, or if he's out, bring any one you can find."

"Oh, I hope father will come!" said Olive pitifully, as she rubbed Monica's cold hands and tried to rouse her.

"Are you one of Franklyn's girls, then?" asked Mr. Howell; "and who is this young lady?"

"Monica Beauchamp. Her grandmother lives at Carson Rise, Mydenham."

"Oh, I've heard of her from my girl," and Lily's father had a good look at the object of his child's envious dislike. "We'll send a message to her grandma as soon as the doctor's been."

The door opened, and Mrs. Howell appeared on the scene, followed by a maid bringing water, smelling-salts, and various other remedies. Her plain, homely face wore an expression of anxiety, and she had evidently hurried so much in response to her husband's imperative summons, that she was short of breath.

"Here, Caroline, you'll know best what to do," said Mr. Howell; "see if you can pull her round. I'll be on the look out for the doctor," and he left the room as he spoke.

"Bless me!" was all Mrs. Howell could find breath enough to say, but she busied herself with trying the various restoratives the elderly servant handed to her, and in a few moments Monica opened her eyes.

"Where am I?" she murmured, seeing strange faces bent over her, and Mrs. Howell nudged Olive to speak to her friend.

"You're at Mrs. Howell's, Monica; you hurt your foot, you know. But don't try to talk now. Father will be here directly." She spoke with a confidence she was far from feeling, for it was quite possible that Dr. Franklyn was some distance away.

A spasm of pain passed over Monica's white face. "Oh, my ankle, how it does hurt!" she said, as she tried to alter the position of the injured limb, but could not bear the agony the movement caused.

"Bathe it again, Martha," said Mrs. Howell, to the maid who was standing by. Then she stroked Monica's rumpled hair, kindly, but somewhat hesitatingly,

while she murmured, "Poor dear."

The motherly woman would have liked to have said much more, to show this young stranger within her gates how sorry she was for her; but she had heard how haughty she was from Lily, and she was afraid of saying anything for fear of giving offence. For one thing she was very thankful: and that was that Lily had gone to some friends at a distance to spend the half-term holiday, so there was no fear of her turning up to make a fuss.

Every one breathed a sigh of relief when Dr. Franklyn was announced.

"Oh, father, I *am* glad you were in!" said Olive, as she caught impetuously at his arm.

"I hope you had no hand in this, Olive," he said, as he began, with professional touch, to examine the swollen ankle.

"No, father, no; indeed I didn't; it was no one's fault, but quite an accident," she assured him, so earnestly, that he was fain to believe that his careless, heedless child was not to blame in this instance.

"Well, well," he said, "it might have been much worse. There are no bones broken, but it is a nasty sprain; you won't do much walking for a little while, young lady." And he looked with compassion at the girl, who he knew was so full of energy.

"How long?" was all Monica's quivering lips could articulate. Her ankle was suffering so acutely from the doctor's handling, gentle as it had been, that it took all her courage to keep the tears back.

"Oh, two or three weeks, perhaps," was the reply, kindly but truthfully given. It was never his way to tell his patients half-truths, and buoy them up with hopes that had not a shadow of a chance of being realised. "It will all depend upon whether you obey orders or not, how soon it will get better."

At the word "obey," a pang of remorse seized Monica; how she had failed in obedience, and how bitterly she was suffering the penalty for a very little act of disobedience (as she thought) even now. A sob rose in her throat, but she gulped it down, and turned her face slightly away.

"Now, Olive, my child, if Mrs. Howell will excuse you, come home with me," said Dr. Franklyn, as, having done all he could to relieve the sprained ankle, he prepared to depart. "Mr. Howell has sent to Mrs. Beauchamp, and your friend will be able to go home in her grandmother's carriage when it arrives, and your mother will be anxious about you. By the way, I can't imagine where Elsa is," he added as they reached the hall door; and for the first time Olive remembered the other two girls.

"Oh, father, suppose they have been waiting all this time for us? What a dreadful afternoon this has been!" And she felt ready to cry.

"Cheer up, Olive," said her father kindly, pitying her unhappiness; "we'll

send some one to the white gate in case they should be there; but I expect they gave you up long since, and we shall hear that they went on to Carson Rise as you arranged."

Meanwhile, how had Elsa and Amethyst been faring?

In spite of her reassuring words to Amethyst, Elsa felt a considerable amount of trepidation as she and her companion mounted the flight of wide, stone steps, and rang the bell at the front door of Mrs. Beauchamp's residence. She was mentally deciding what it would be best to say, when the door opened, and the trim parlourmaid appeared. Elsa had half hoped that Monica would have been on the look-out, and have opened the door herself, so as to make the late-comers feel more comfortable. So she was astounded when the maid replied, in answer to her diffident enquiry, that the other young ladies had not arrived yet.

Elsa and Amethyst looked askance at each other, one thought uppermost in both their minds. "Suppose they should be waiting for us at the white gate!"

"My mistress is rather put about to think Miss Monica should be so late coming back; would you please to walk in and explain, miss?" suggested the maid to Elsa, who seemed to be spokeswoman.

"Oh, yes, of course, we will tell all we know," said Elsa, and she and Amethyst silently followed the maid to the drawing-room, where Mrs. Beauchamp was sitting by one of the open French windows, which overlooked part of the prettily laid-out gardens.

"Well, my dear, how are you?" she said, as Elsa approached, and held out a timid hand; "and is this your little friend?" And the old lady looked approvingly at the pretty, childish face and simple attire of the vicar's little daughter. "But how is it you have arrived alone? Where are Monica and your sister?"

"Oh, Mrs. Beauchamp, we can't think what they are doing!" And Elsa told the whole story of what had occurred that afternoon, at least, as far as the present state of affairs was concerned; finishing up by saying, "We wouldn't have been so long, indeed we wouldn't, if we had known how late it was. I am almost sorry, now, that we went all the way with the old woman, but we thought it was right at the time." And Elsa's eyes filled with tears.

"You did quite right, children, no one could blame you," said Mrs. Beauchamp, more kindly than Monica ever heard her speak. "I am only sorry that my granddaughter did not wish to act as you did." And the old lady sighed as she thought of the difference between self-pleasing, self-willed Monica, and this nice-speaking, unselfish girl; and the advantage was all on Elsa's side. "The thing to be considered is, where are they now?"

"Do you think they might still be waiting for us?" queried Amethyst, who had been a silent spectator so far. "Shall we go back and see?"

Mrs. Beauchamp smiled. "I think we can manage better than that," she said.

"I will send a messenger to the gate in West Lane, in case they should be there, and we will have some tea, for I am sure you must be thirsty after hurrying so, on this hot day. I quite expect that before very long they will come rushing in."

The two girls were very glad to wash their hands and smooth their dishevelled hair; and Amethyst was delighted to see Monica's room (where Barnes had taken them) for the first time.

Then they went into the dining-room, where a sumptuous repast had been spread for the quartette, Mrs. Beauchamp knowing something, from experience, of young people's appetites. If it had not been for the suspense about the other girls, Elsa and Amethyst would have enjoyed themselves immensely.

Mrs. Beauchamp was so very kind, and made herself quite agreeable to these two well-behaved girls; indeed Amethyst, who was light-hearted by nature, almost forgot the unfortunate ending to their picnic, but Elsa was unable to banish the thought from her mind that something must have happened to them to cause such delay, and she could see that Mrs. Beauchamp was very much worried, although she strove to entertain her little guests cheerfully.

"You are not making much of a tea, my dear. Try one of these," and Mrs. Beauchamp held a plate of delicious looking macaroons toward Elsa.

"No, thank you, I don't feel as if I could eat another mouthful." And Elsa's tears, which had been very near the surface for some time, rained down her cheeks, while a sob choked her voice.

"Don't fret, my dear," said Mrs. Beauchamp, soothingly, albeit her own voice shook.

"I am so afraid something has happened," sobbed Elsa, and she hid her face in her hands.

"Let us hope not; they may have been hindered in some way," replied Mrs. Beauchamp; but even as she spoke, a maid entered the room with an expression of alarm on her face.

"If you please, ma'am----" she began.

"What is it, Harriet? Tell me at once?" And Mrs. Beauchamp clutched the back of her chair for support, while her face assumed an ashen hue, and poor Elsa felt inclined to scream.

"A man's come from Osmington, from Mr. Howell's place, ma'am, to say as there's been an accident, ma'am, and Miss Monica's leg is hurt. It were something to do with one of these motors, ma'am, but he says he was told to say it weren't by no means serious."

A tinge of colour came into Mrs. Beauchamp's cheeks, as the servant reached the end of her sentence; she had dreaded she knew not what.

"Is the man here, Harriet? Have him taken to the morning-room, and I will see him," she faltered.

"Oh! please may we hear too?" asked Elsa, with quivering lips.

And the old lady, reading the alarm in the girl's tense young face, said: "Of course, my dear."

By dint of much questioning they got some idea of what had occurred; and, relieved to a certain extent by having definite news of her grandchild, Mrs. Beauchamp made speedy arrangements for her conveyance home.

In a very few minutes the brougham was at the door, and into it stepped Mrs. Beauchamp and the two girls, followed by the reliable Barnes, who was always to be depended upon in an emergency.

Elsa and Amethyst would dearly have liked to go as far as the Howells', so as to know exactly how Monica was, but when Mrs. Beauchamp ordered the coachman to put them down at Dr. Franklyn's, on his way through the town, they did not dare to make the suggestion.

CHAPTER X.

"I LIKE FUSSIN' OVER PEOPLE!"

With a sigh of relief Monica heard the front door shut, and saw the retreating figures of the doctor and Olive passing down the drive, from her post of vantage in the great bay window. She wanted to think; at least, she was not sure that she *wanted* to, but ideas suggested themselves to her brain and insisted upon being thought out.

How *could* she, who never before had been actually laid up with any ailment, endure the thought of being for three weeks, at least, chained like a log to a sofa? And, just as likely as not, it would end in being a month, or even more. Oh, it was unendurable! No school--no fun--no daily meeting with all the girls, and Olive, of course, in particular: and Monica realised how wonderfully attached she had become to school-life and doings, even in seven short weeks. No pleasant German lessons with kind little Fräulein Wespe, which she so much enjoyed. Nothing but day after day in one or other of the dull, lonely rooms at Carson Rise, waited on by Barnes, and visited periodically by her grandmother, who she was sure, from experience, would gladly seize every available opportunity of improving the occasion by telling her she had only herself to thank for the position in which she found herself!

How heartily Monica wished now that she had never seen the wretched

bicycle, as she styled it, much less have been persuaded into attempting to ride it. In her vexation she blamed the bicycle, its owner, Elsa and Amethyst for being late, and even poor, unfortunate old Granny Wood, for being the primary cause of the mishap. It is a wonder that she did not go one step farther, and credit Hero with originating the whole chapter of accidents, for it certainly was his bark that started the ball rolling. If Monica had heard any one else *saying* what she was *thinking*, she would have been exceedingly amused, for it sounded like a modern version of the "House that Jack built." But she saw no fun in anything just then, all was disappointment, discomfort, and pain; and yet in her heart of hearts, Monica knew that it all arose from disobedience.

Not for worlds would she have owned it even to herself, but as she lay on that couch, looking out into the sunlit garden and thinking, her better nature craved after a nobler, higher life, where disobedience and its results would have no place. She thought of her father and his words to her in that almost forgotten letter, and unwonted tears rose to her eyes, as she realised that instead of becoming what he wanted her to be, she seemed lately to have grown less and less like the ideal she had even set up for herself in those days.

Monica's ruminations were brought to an abrupt termination at this moment by the door opening, and a pleasant rattle of teacups sounded on her ears as the footman appeared with the tea equipage. Mrs. Howell followed him in, and busied herself in pouring out a cup of the fragrant beverage, and placing it on a little table at Monica's elbow, saying in her uncultured but kindly tones: "There's nothin' so comfortin' as a cup of tea, to my mind; have a good drink, do 'ee now, my----"

The good soul paused, in confusion, at the words which had so nearly slipped out. What would this haughty young maiden have said if she had called her "my dear?" So she made a nervous little cough, and added, in an apologetic voice, "Miss Beauchamp."

"Thanks, you're very kind," replied Monica, in her off-hand way. "I'm sure I'm awfully sorry to give you such a lot of trouble."

"It's no trouble at all, my dear," said her hostess warmly, quite forgetting to watch her words this time; but Monica did not appear to mind the appellation, it seemed natural to be called "my dear" by a person of Mrs. Howell's description. "I like fussin' over people." And the good woman looked a wee bit wistful, for Lily hated above all things to be "fussed over by ma."

"I don't think I should care about it always," said Monica candidly, with a little laugh; "but just now it feels rather nice to be waited on," and she smiled up into the homely face, surmounted by the magnificent, but too lavishly trimmed cap, which was bending over her.

Mrs. Howell's heart went out to this girl, who seemed so different from

what Lily had declared her to be; and Monica, realising the motherliness which underlay all the oddities and vulgarities, felt strangely drawn towards her commonplace hostess. They were becoming quite at home with each other, when carriage wheels were heard, and "Mrs. Beauchamp" was announced.

A hasty glance at the visitor's aristocratic appearance, and the sound of her well-modulated voice, made poor Mrs. Howell realise her many deficiencies once again, and she relapsed into monosyllabic replies to Mrs. Beauchamp's many enquiries. So Monica had perforce to be chief spokeswoman.

"Well, I am glad that it is no worse than it is," said her grandmother stiffly. "The anxiety your non-appearance caused me was intense; and all this trouble and inconvenience to everybody would have been avoided, if you had not disobeyed my commands." And she shook her head severely at the culprit, who showed no sign of contrition for her misdeeds. "Well, you will have plenty of time to reflect, so we will say no more now," added the old lady, "but with Mrs. Howell's permission Barnes shall help you out to the carriage, and we will not trespass further on her kindness."

"Oh, I can hobble out by myself, somehow," said Monica, and she tried to get up off the couch, but fell back among the cushions with a stifled groan.

"Let me help you, my dear," whispered Mrs. Howell, so low that no one but Monica heard her, and with a supreme effort the girl managed just to stand, by holding tight to the velvet-covered arm which was offered for her to lean on. But to walk was absolutely impossible, the mere movement of the injured ankle (the pain had been tolerably easy while it had been laid up) was so excruciating, that even strong-willed Monica could not summon up courage to put it to the ground.

"I'm afraid I can't walk," she was obliged to confess, with white, quivering lips, just as Mr. Howell appeared upon the scene.

"How now, young lady?" he said, in his bluff way; "not trying to walk, surely? You don't look any too fit."

"Couldn't me an' you help her out to the carriage, Bob?" his wife said, in a somewhat loud aside. "Her grandma wants to be off."

"If the young lady will allow me, I think the best plan will be for me to pick her up and carry her out," he said, with a grandiloquent bow.

"Really, I cannot----" began Mrs. Beauchamp, in horrified tones.

And Monica said: "Oh! no, please."

But without more ado, the big burly man lifted her gently in his strong arms, saying, with a twinkle of amusement in his eyes: "It won't be the first time to-day, missy," and before Mrs. Beauchamp had had time to summon Barnes, Monica was comfortably settled in the brougham, with her injured ankle resting on a board, and some cushions, which Barnes' forethought had provided.

"Thank you ever so much, Mr. Howell," said Monica gratefully, "and Mrs.

Howell too."

"Tut, tut, missy! T'was a pleasure to her to have some one to coddle."

"I should like to come and see her some day, when my ankle is well again, if I may."

"She'd be very glad if you would," was Mr. Howell's reply, as he handed Mrs. Beauchamp into the carriage, and shut the door after Barnes had squeezed herself into the tiny bit of space that was left.

"I am sure we are very much indebted to you for all your kindness," said Mrs. Beauchamp, in her freezingly polite way, as he stood, hat in hand, waiting to see the carriage off.

"Pray don't mention it, madam," was all he said, as he bowed in response to her formal "good evening"; the smile that overspread his rugged, good-tempered face was for the girl who nodded a bright farewell, albeit her face was white and drawn with pain.

"A noble lass, that," was Mr. Howell's comment, as he sauntered round the beautifully laid-out garden with his worthy spouse; "but a vixen of a grandmother, to judge from looks."

Mrs. Howell, who had not been very prepossessed herself, felt it her duty to remonstrate with him for judging hastily.

"The gentry always has such airs," she said; "I daresay the old lady means well enough. But I must say I did take to the girl."

"And she to you, apparently." And her husband repeated what Monica had said about coming again.

"Bless her!" ejaculated warm-hearted Mrs. Howell; and then she added wistfully, "I wish, Bob----"

"What, old girl?"

"That our Lily was a bit more like her."

"Tut, tut!" he said. "This Miss Beauchamp is a lady, born and bred; and our girl ain't got a drop of blue blood in her veins."

"Our Lily don't seem to have got no heart, somehow," sighed her mother. "She's all for clothes, an' pleasure, an' pleasin' herself."

"It's the brass that's to blame for that," said the man who had amassed a fortune of over a quarter of a million. "I'm almost sorry I had such a streak of luck. We were happier in the old days, Caroline, when we lived in the little house at Bermondsey, and went out marketing together Saturday nights, guess the old proverb that 'money's the root of all evil' is about right. It's all very well, but it don't buy happiness."

"That ain't a proverb, Bob," said his wife, reprovingly, "it's in the Bible, and it says it's the love of money that makes all the mischief. I sometimes think, Bob," she added, a trifle hesitatingly, for she was treading on tender ground, "that if we

were a bit religious, we should be happier like."

"Time enough for religion when you get notice to quit," he replied with a hard laugh, which had no mirth in it. "'Do as you would be done by' is a good enough creed for me; and if everybody acted up to it the world would be a better place than it is, with all its parsons and church-going."

"That ain't enough to take you to heaven, Bob," said Mrs. Howell, sadly, but as she knew no better way to suggest she said no more, and the subject dropped. But in the plain, homely woman's breast there was a deep, unsatisfied longing after a peace which she had never found, amid all the luxuries and splendour of her surroundings.

While the above conversation was taking place, and Monica was being driven slowly home, the story of that disastrous day was being eagerly detailed by the other three girls at the Franklyns', whither Amethyst had accompanied Elsa, and where to her great delight she found her mother sitting with Mrs. Franklyn.

Fortunately for the invalid, no rumour of the accident had reached her room, Mr. Howell's messenger having met the doctor after he had left home a few minutes; so that she and Mrs. Drury had been enjoying a little confidential chat about their children over a cup of tea; never dreaming but that they were all having a splendid time at Carson Rise, until Olive, who was followed by the other two girls before there had been time to become anxious about them, told how differently they had been placed.

Olive and Amethyst both talked together, and there was such a confused jargon going on, that for some time neither of the ladies could get a very clear idea of what had happened; but eventually Elsa was appealed to for her version of the affair, and then they understood better.

"Dear me, I am sorry for Monica," said Mrs. Drury sympathetically; "it will be a long business, I am afraid."

"Poor child!" murmured the invalid; "how will she bear it?"

"It's awfully hard lines on her," cried Olive vehemently, "shut up in that great, dull house for weeks. And I shall miss her just dreadfully."

"I'm glad it isn't me," said Amethyst; "not that I should mind being laid up if mumsie nursed me," with an affectionate press of her mother's hand, at whose feet she had thrown herself. "But you get so low in class if you are away from school long."

"There are lessons to be learnt on a sofa, my child, that are more important than all the school ones," said the invalid gently; "and by learning them properly a higher place can be gained than any that the High School can bestow."

"I don't think I understand, Mrs. Franklyn," said Amethyst, in a puzzled

tone, while Elsa crept nearer to her mother, and kissed her thin, white hand, a little comprehensive smile flickering about her mouth. Olive looked on, a trifle superciliously; if it had not been for Mrs. Drury's presence, she would have said: "For goodness' sake, don't preach, mamma!"

"I mean the lessons in God's school, dearie, the difficult things we are so slow to learn. It is only when 'He teaches us of His ways' that we can 'walk in His paths.' I was thinking perhaps God had allowed this accident to happen to Monica, so that she might have time to think of these things."

"Monica is good enough as she is," cried Olive tempestuously; "we don't all want to be goody-goodies like some people I know. There would never be a bit of fun left then." And she stood up defiantly.

With a significant glance at Mrs. Franklyn, whose pale face wore a grieved, sad expression, Mrs. Drury took the matter into her own hands.

"I am sorry, Olive, that you should feel like that," she said calmly, while she looked searchingly into the defiant face of the young girl, who was picking a tea-rose to pieces with thoughtless fingers. "But it is a good thing, sometimes, to say what one feels. You must have been unfortunate in your acquaintance with Christians if you find them dull and gloomy. They are not all so, I can assure you. Indeed there is no one so light-hearted, no life so sunshiny, as that of a true follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is just because we are so happy with Him as our Friend, as well as Teacher, that we want all those whom we know, and love, to become learners in His school. For we remember that the Examination Day is coming, and unless we have Him as our helper, we shall certainly 'fail,' instead of 'pass.' You know yourself from school experience that there are only the two positions to be in; and it rests with each one of us to decide, now, which state shall be ours hereafter."

As Mrs. Drury ended her sentence, she lowered her voice, until it was scarcely more than a whisper, but the silence which had fallen upon the little group was so intense that every word was distinctly audible. Amethyst looked up into her mother's face, and said, with real earnestness: "I do want to pass *that* examination, mumsie," and Mrs. Drury bent down and kissed the upturned face with clinging tenderness, for she knew that her little daughter's real desire was to please her Saviour, although she very often failed to do so.

But just at that moment her heart went out with a great longing towards that other mother's girl, who seemed so unwilling to put first things *first.* Her eyes sought Olive's, so that she might, if possible, read in them something of her thoughts, but Olive kept her head persistently turned away, and so she could not gauge what was passing in her mind.

So, with a prayer in her heart (oft repeated as time passed) that God would show Olive her need of a Saviour, she bade the invalid a tender farewell, with a

whispered word of hope, and after good-byes had been exchanged, Mrs. Drury and Amethyst took their departure.

The little girl chattered volubly of all the incidents of the afternoon, as they walked home in the pleasant coolness which had succeeded the heat of that June day, but Mrs. Drury was a trifle abstracted. She was thinking of the friend she had left, who appeared to her to be losing, rather than gaining strength, of the sorrow that the indecision of some of her children, with regard to spiritual things, caused the patient invalid. For a moment, a subtle temptation presented itself: why did not a gracious Father answer His children's prayers for their loved ones more speedily. But she thrust the thought from her, knowing well that God both could, and would, do all things well, in His own good time.

"Father will be astonished when we tell him, won't he?" piped Amethyst, in her childish treble, and Mrs. Drury's eyes lost their far-away look as she smiled into the animated little face, which only reached to her shoulder.

"Yes, very," she replied, "but you won't see him to-night, dearie, for he has gone to a big meeting at Alwinton and he will not be home until quite late."

"Oh!" Amethyst's face fell somewhat; she rather liked telling her own news, and the events of that day had been quite exciting ones to her. "Well, you will have to tell him then, mumsie, I suppose. But couldn't you only say just enough, and leave the rest for me to tell at breakfast?"

And her mother promised she would.

CHAPTER XI.

"A NICE ENOUGH LITTLE DOG, AS DOGS GO."

"Is there anything else you're wanting, Miss Monica?"

And Mary Ann, who had been for the last half-hour engaged in arranging everything for the comfort and convenience of her young mistress, paused as she reached the door of the apartment, half-schoolroom, half-boudoir, which Monica called her "prison-house," and looked towards the occupant of a low couch that had been drawn up to the open window.

"Oh, yes, you might put those books where I can reach them," and Monica indicated a pile of library books which were lying on a low bookcase in a corner of the room. The maid obeyed, and placed them on a table by Monica's side, on which she kept the various things with which she vainly endeavoured to while

away the tedium of the long, long days.

"Are you sure there's nothing else, miss?"

"I don't think there is, thanks." And the housemaid was just departing, when she was recalled by the sound of her name.

"Oh, Mary Ann!"

"Yes, miss?"

"Which is your evening out?"

"Fridays, Miss Monica," said the girl, astonishment expressed in both face and voice. Whatever could be coming to their young lady? Never before had she taken the slightest interest in the outings of her grandmother's domestics!

"Let me see, to-day is Friday," mused Monica, "could you do an errand for me while you are out this evening, Mary Ann?"

"Well, miss, it all depends," replied the under-housemaid, cautiously. "Where would it be, miss?"

"Oh, it's only to take back these books and get me some fresh ones from Bell's Library," said Monica. "Are you fond of reading, Mary Ann?"

"La, yes, miss," admitted the girl with a giggle. "Cook says I get right down wropt up in my book, and they have to shake me sometimes, when I'm sittin' readin' in the kitchen of a evening, for I never 'ears no one a-speakin' when I'm deep in my story."

"Well, I daresay I could lend you a book, now and again," said Monica graciously. "And you think you could go to Bell's this evening?"

"Why, yes, Miss Monica, I'll go with pleasure," said the girl, delighted at the prospect of the loan of some books. "Me and Jim (that's my young man, miss," she explained with a simper and a blush) "we generally strolls down High Street, and I can easy pop in and get 'em."

"Well, here is a list of half a dozen," said Monica, handing her a paper. "Ask them to give you any three that are in, and tell them who they're for."

"Very good, Miss Monica," and Mary Ann finally departed.

Left to herself, Monica began to wonder how she should pass the weary hours of that hot June day.

"I wish Olive hadn't been yesterday, now," she mused; "because there is not the faintest chance of her coming over again to-day; she said she would come to-morrow if she could. Oh, dear! I do think some of the girls might come. I'd rather have Elsa, or even that little Amethyst Drury, than nothing but my own company all day long. I do wish I could have a dog, it would not be so sickeningly dull then." And she heaved a weary sigh of discontent. "What a nuisance this horrid sprain is! You simply can't do anything but read, when you can't move your leg, and I hate needlework. I'm glad I thought of getting Mary Ann to go for some fresh books. Heigho! I wish I hadn't hurried so over the last one yesterday, I should

have had some left to read now, but it was so fascinating I couldn't leave off once I began."

At that moment a footfall was heard on the richly carpeted stairway, and Mrs. Beauchamp opened the door. Monica looked up in astonishment; it was quite an hour earlier than her grandmother usually paid her morning visit.

"Good morning, Monica," she said, as she bent and just touched the girl's forehead with cold, undemonstrative lips, "I hope your ankle is going on well."

"Oh, I suppose it is, but I wish it had never been ill," replied Monica with grim humour. "I'm sick of lying here."

"You have only yourself to blame," was the old lady's unconsoling reply; "if you had not been disobedient, all this would have been avoided." And she waved her slender white hand expressively towards Monica's injured limb.

With a pout, Monica looked out of the window, muttering something about "the same old tale."

Her grandmother, who was slightly deaf, did not catch the words, but she saw the gesture, and drew her own conclusions. With a sigh, Mrs. Beauchamp wished, for the hundredth time, that she had never undertaken the charge of this troublesome granddaughter; her coming into the prim household had made an end of all its restful quiet, and she never seemed free from anxiety about her. And yet--Conrad had intreated her so earnestly to have his only and much-loved child, and at the time she had seemed tractable enough. But oh! how greatly Monica had altered in eighteen short months; perhaps she had had mistaken ideas about her upbringing; perhaps, if she had been a little less strict in minor matters, things might have gone more smoothly; perhaps old Dr. Marley was right when he said: "It is easier to lead than to drive young people."

With these thoughts in her mind, the old lady made a proposition that nearly took Monica's breath away; so unexpected was it.

"I have been thinking that perhaps you might have a small dog of some kind, Monica; it would be company for you while you are laid up."

"Oh, grandmother!" was all the girl could find to say; but the look of intense pleasure which irradiated her whole face, entirely transforming it, was sufficient reward to Mrs. Beauchamp for the very real concession she was making; for, of all things, a mischievous, gambolling dog *indoors*, who would be sure to bark or whine just when she was having a little nap, was one that she objected to most.

"Of course, it must be a very nice quiet one, Monica, small and well-trained. Perhaps Richards might hear of one somewhere."

"Oh! grandmother, do you remember that day you decided I was to go to school?" Monica questioned, eagerly; "because Tom had just been telling me about a jolly little wire-haired terrier his father wanted a home for, when you sent for me."

"I do remember something of the sort, Monica," said the old lady, "but even if the dog were still to be had, it might not be just what we want."

"Well, I do wish you would send round to the stables and ask, grandmother," said Monica, coaxingly "because we could have him at once, I expect. We might have to wait ever so long before Richards came across one, he is so dreadfully slow. And it *is* so dull up here, all alone."

"Well, I will see what can be done."

And the old lady departed, a comfortable feeling of having given pleasure warming her cold, reserved heart; while Monica reiterated again and again, in words which jarred terribly on her aristocratic nerves: "It's most awfully kind of you, grandmother! It *will* be jolly to have a dog of my own."

To say that Monica waited patiently for results would be untrue. She was far too excited and eager about the matter to do that; but as she was alone, except for a flying visit from Barnes, who brought her some lunch, and as she could not move her leg, her impatience had a salutary amount of check. She could not think how it was her grandmother had ever brought her mind to think of such a thing, knowing well how keenly she objected to animals indoors; it puzzled her a good deal, especially after her disobedience earlier in the week. And Monica grew quite repentant for her misdeeds, as she considered the unexpected favour she was being granted.

An hour or so later a peculiar scratching noise along the corridor outside made Monica listen intently, and a second after there came a hesitating knock at the door.

"Come in," cried Monica, who was all excitement; and the door opened to admit Tom, the little stable-boy, who was leading the cutest looking wire-haired terrier imaginable, and was closely followed by Barnes.

"Oh, you darling!" cried Monica, who was infatuated with the dog at first sight; "do bring him close, Tom."

"Yes, miss," said Tom, with alacrity, pulling his forelock, and grinning all over his bright little face, as he clutched hold of the bit of strap that did duty for a collar, and dragged the terrier up to Monica's couch. "I hope you're better, miss," he ventured to say shyly, for Barnes, of whom he stood greatly in awe, was looking severely at him, and he had been bidden "to mind his behaviour."

"Oh, yes," said Monica, carelessly; she had no thoughts to spare on herself just then. "What's his name, Tom? Do put him up beside me."

"Be careful, now," said Barnes, a trifle sharply; she was not best pleased at this introduction into the household. "Remember your leg, Miss Monica."

"All right, Barnes, don't fidget! See, he's as quiet as possible. Good boy, dear old fellow!" and Monica stroked the ginger coloured head, and looked into the liquid brown eyes which had a wistful expression in them. He pricked up his

ears at the tones of endearment, and licked her hands in response.

"'E 'ave took to you, an' no mistake, miss," said Tom, with huge delight. "Jack 'e 'ave been called, miss," he added, in answer to Monica's query, "but you'll find 'im a grander name, miss, now."

"No, I think Jack will do very well," said Monica, and the little dog, who knew by her fondling that he was being loved and made much of, gave a little grunt of satisfaction, and curled himself round on the couch beside his new mistress.

"Isn't he sweet, Barnes?"

"Oh, he's a nice enough little dog, as dogs go, Miss Monica, but I have no particular fancy for them," was the maid's somewhat grudging reply. And then she added: "Now then, my boy, you'd better be off to your work again."

"Yes'm. Good mornin', miss," stammered Tom, in confusion, for Barnes' repelling tones made him feel as if he had done something wrong.

"Oh, good-bye, Tom. I'm awfully glad to have Jack," said Monica, with a bright smile, which made the little lad feel at ease again, and remained in his memory for many a day. "I shall be coming out on the lawn in a few days' time, and then you must come round and see him."

The little newcomer proved an endless source of pleasure and amusement to Monica; he had such quaint ways, and made himself thoroughly happy and contented in his new home. Even Mrs. Beauchamp was obliged to confess that he was no trouble; he spent hours curled up on the rug which was thrown over Monica's knees, as if he had been accustomed to an invalid mistress all his life.

"You wait until this tiresome sprain is well," Monica would often say to him, "and then you shall have a very different existence, Jack."

The old doctor made great friends with him when he came to see his patient the next morning, and went off chuckling with pleasure over the result of his plain-speaking to Mrs. Beauchamp, a few days before.

"She'll get on fast enough now," he said to himself, as he trotted down the drive; "young folk want young things about them, and up there," with a suggestive glance backward at the stately residence he had just left, "they are all as old as Methuselah. She looked a totally different being this morning, from the sulky, discontented girl I saw last time. But I don't deny she's a handful--takes after her mother, I suppose. Conrad was as nice a fellow as ever breathed, but I never had much of a fancy for his wife, poor thing; she was too much of a woman of the world for old Henry Marley. But there, he isn't, by any means, all he ought to be." And the dear old doctor sighed as he realised how far short he was of being a true copy of the Great Example.

The doctor had not long left, when a footman called at Carson Rise, with a basket containing some magnificent peaches and hot-house flowers, "with Mrs. Howell's compliments, and she would be glad to know how the young lady was."

Mrs. Beauchamp was out for a drive, so the parlourmaid came up to Monica for a message.

"Oh, Harriet, how lovely!" cried the girl; "do take them out carefully while I write a little note to send back. How very kind of Mrs. Howell."

"The same lady has sent every day to enquire for you, miss," said the maid, who was very much impressed by the grandeur of the Howell livery, and the importance of the individual who wore it.

"Has she really? No one has mentioned it before," said Monica; "I ought to have been told." And there was a suggestion of displeasure in her tones.

"Mrs. Beauchamp knew, miss, of course, and so did Barnes," Harriet hastened to say, in defence of herself.

"Very well, Harriet, it was not your fault," said Monica, and she busied herself in writing a little girlish note of thanks, which brought tears of pleasure and gratification to the eyes of the good-natured, motherly woman who received it, and then slipped it into her pocket for fear her tyrannical young daughter should come across it, and make fun of it. For Lily Howell had not yet grown reconciled to the idea of "*that* Monica Beauchamp" getting into her home, and prying into everything, and then going off to make fun of all the mistakes she knew her mother must have made.

There had been a great scene upon her return home, on the Monday evening, and she had exclaimed long and loudly against the fate which had allowed such an unfortunate thing to come to pass.

Mrs. Howell, instead of severely reprimanding her daughter for being so insulting and rude, had wept feebly, and bowed beneath the angry girl's storm of words; but in her heart she treasured the remembrance of the kind words and very real gratitude of a daughter of the aristocracy to a poor, common-place woman, such as she was allowed no opportunity of forgetting that she, Caroline Howell, was.

CHAPTER XII.

"A HUNGRY FEELING IN MY BRAIN."

"What do you think of this?" said Monica, that same Saturday afternoon, as she pointed to Jack, who was lying curled up on her rug.

And Olive was astounded, as her friend knew she would be, at such an

unexpected sight.

"Oh! isn't he a dear fellow?" she cried, rapturously, patting his head, and playing with his well-shaped ears, as Jack first sniffed enquiringly at the boots and dress of his young mistress's friend, and then, with a wag of his stumpy bit of tail, sat down on the floor at her feet, and rested his head against her knees. "He is going to like me at once."

"Of course, he is," said Monica; "it will be Jack's business to like all my friends and hate all my enemies."

"Oh, Monica, I don't think you've got any enemies!"

"Haven't I?" enquired Monica quizzically; "what about Lily Howell?"

"Oh, I forgot her," replied the other merrily; "and yet I ought not to have, for she's been in such a temper all the week. She's tried every way she can to get Elsa and me into trouble, and when she finds she can't manage it, she's in a worse tantrum than ever. I can't think why she's in such a mood," continued Olive, meditatively, "unless it is----"

"Oh, I expect she's huffy because Mr. Howell took me into his house," interrupted Monica, "and she wasn't at home to see all that went on. But I don't care a straw for her, or what she thinks; she's too common and vulgar to think about. Now her mother is the dearest old creature," she went on, in quite a different tone; "she was as kind and nice as possible. And Harriet tells me she's sent every day to ask how I am, and it was she who sent those lovely peaches and flowers. Do have a peach, Olive; they're awfully nice."

And Monica, taking one herself, pushed the plate containing them nearer to her friend.

"How nice of her!" said Olive, taking a bite of the luscious fruit, while Jack looked up to ascertain whether she was eating anything that he could share. "No, you won't like this, old boy," she said, with a merry laugh.

"He can beg beautifully," said Monica. "When we've eaten these, I'll put him through all his tricks."

A merry quarter of an hour passed in watching Jack beg, and "trust for it," and "die," and "give three cheers for the king." Then, when he was tired, and lay curled up asleep on Monica's couch again, the two girls had a thorough good chat about everything dear to their school-girl hearts, until a clock striking the hour of four warned Olive that she must be going.

Monica begged her to stay to tea with her, saying: "Grandmother quite expects you to."

But, much as Olive would have liked it, she was obliged to refuse, as she had promised her mother to meet Kathleen and the children at a quarter past, at a certain place, so as to walk home together.

"Oh, there's heaps more I wanted to ask," said Monica. "I never dreamt but

that you would stay to tea. What did Fräulein say to my being away yesterday? There will be no chance now of my coming out top in German, and that's the only thing I had a shadow of a chance about." And Monica looked rueful.

"Oh, she was very sorry about your ankle. She had heard from the other mistresses, I expect, for when I tried to explain she said: 'No, yes, but that is ver' sad!' in her broken English. You know how she says it; I can't imitate her properly," said Olive. "But, I say, Monica, you won't be away long, will you? Surely not three weeks?" And Olive's bright face assumed a dismal expression at the thought of being so long without her friend.

"Dr. Marley said this morning it might be better before then, but not fit for school. It is a bore; I wish that old bicycle was further." And the girl groaned.

"So do I," acquiesced Olive sympathetically; neither of them apparently taking into consideration that the bicycle was quite the least guilty of everything and everybody concerned.

"Well, I must go now, but I'll come over as often as I can next week."

"Not to-morrow?"

"Why, that's Sunday!" said Olive, in astonishment.

"What of that?" queried Monica.

"Why, there's no time on Sundays: we go to church twice, and to Miss Grant's class in the afternoon. Besides, mother doesn't let us go for walks on Sundays."

"What a funny idea! I never go, because there's nothing to go for; but I don't think grandmother would mind. She dozes all the afternoon, and I read. Oh, that reminds me: here is the book I promised to lend you, Olive," and she drew it from under her cushions.

"'*A Cruel Fate*';" Olive read the title aloud, and glanced at the closely printed pages. "It doesn't look *very* interesting, Monica."

"Oh, it is, awfully. You can't think how it fascinated me."

"I'm sure mother would not think it was a nice book," she said doubtfully.

"Oh, fiddlesticks!" was Monica's rather rude reply. "You take it home and read it on the quiet, and if you don't want to borrow some more next time you come, I shall be very much mistaken. Your mother can't expect to keep you tied to her apron-strings always." And there was again that suggestion of a sneer underlying the words which Olive could not stand.

A girl with higher principles would have said: "No, thank you, Monica; I would rather not have anything to do with it." And if Olive Franklyn had had the courage to refuse the evil that afternoon, she would have saved herself much sorrow. But she weakly gave in, and slipped the book into her string-bag, well knowing that she was flatly disobeying her mother's commands.

Poor Olive! She carried more away with her from Carson Rise than the

novel; already the poison was beginning its deadly work. How could she manage so that not even Elsa should know she had it in her possession? She was very differently situated from Monica: in their large family they had no secret drawers or private hiding-places, everything was common property, and she could depend on nowhere being absolutely safe.

She was so deep in thought about it, that she almost ran into Kathleen and the children before she knew they were approaching her, and she was so preoccupied during the walk home that Kathleen teased her about having left her tongue at Carson Rise. She pulled herself together then, but alas! the same complaint became an habitual one, as time went on and Olive Franklyn, careless, light-hearted, and fun-loving, but hitherto always open and frank, became moody, abstracted, peevish, and discontented.

That first book was but the forerunner of many more; she became absolutely possessed by an insatiable thirst for novel-reading. Indeed, the girl became so engrossed in them that ordinary, everyday life had no attraction for her, the distorted views of life which the novels gave her totally unfitting her for both school and home associations.

Lois and Kathleen noticed the change in their young sister and puzzled over it, but their mother put it down to Monica being laid up.

"See how anxious she is to go over to see her friend as often as possible," said Mrs. Franklyn; "it is evident that they are very fond of one another, and she misses her companionship. It will be all right when Monica gets back to school; Olive will be her usual happy, contented self again then."

And as they had no inkling of the land of unrealities in which the girl was living, her sisters accepted the mother's verdict, and good-naturedly made it possible for Olive to go over to Carson Rise quite frequently, little dreaming that, each time she went, fresh fuel was added to the flame.

Monica, who, at first, had smiled with satisfaction when she found her prediction come true, began to be a little alarmed as time went on and Olive kept continually asking for a fresh book. She was rather a slow reader herself, but Olive seemed literally to devour them.

"How *do* you manage to find time to read such a lot?" she said incredulously one Monday afternoon, when they were sitting in a rustic summer-house, in a shady corner of the sheltered garden, and Olive had admitted that she had already finished a three-volume novel that she had taken home only the Saturday before. "I can't think how you do it!"

"I can't leave off," said Olive. "As it happens, Elsa is grinding hard for her music exam., so she spends hours in the drawing-room practising, and that leaves me the 'den' pretty much to myself. But if she weren't, I should just *have* to make opportunities somehow, for I am perfectly wretched when I can't have a read."

"But I thought your people objected to novel-reading. Do none of them ever catch you at it? and how do you manage to do your home-work?" said Monica, still incredulous.

"No, they haven't yet; but I live in dread of discovery every day," confessed her friend. "As to lessons, I manage to scrape along somehow."

"Well, I'm almost sorry I ever lent you a book," said Monica, who could detect a subtle difference in Olive, and felt uneasy.

"Oh, Monica, how often and often I've wished that I'd never borrowed that first one!" said the poor infatuated girl; "and, sometimes, I think I'll never touch a novel again. But I always have to; I can't seem to live without reading them now. There's a hungry feeling in my brain. I can't explain what I mean, but it feels quite empty, somehow, until I have a good read, and then I feel better. Don't you ever get sensations like that?" and the poor child looked pitifully at her companion.

"No, I can't say I do," admitted Monica; "and I hope I never shall. I like reading, certainly, and there is more excitement in a regular novel than there is in ordinary little goody-goody books. But I'm not so keen on them as I was; they're rather horrid sometimes. But I think you'd better give them up, Olive."

"Oh, I can't, Monica!"

"Well, I really don't think I shall lend you any more."

But Olive pleaded so pitifully for just one, that Monica reluctantly gave in, saying: "That's the only one I've got that you haven't had, so you must make the most of it. I'm not sure that I'm going to have any more."

"Oh, Monica, *do*, to please me!" pleaded Olive. "I'm not at all sure. By the way, did, you bring back those you've finished, because they must go to the library."

"No, I couldn't; they would have made rather a large parcel, and I had no way of hiding it, especially as Elsa and Paddy came half-way with me."

"Well, take good care no one spies them," cautioned Monica. "I don't want to have the credit of leading you astray."

And Olive promised to be careful, as indeed she always was. As a matter of fact, not the least of the sins to be laid at the door of her novel-reading on the sly was the deceit she had to practise in order to hide the books.

Three weeks had already sped since the half-term holiday, and still Monica could scarcely bear to stand on her ankle, so severe had been the sprain. There was little likelihood of her being back at school for quite another week or ten days; indeed, Mrs. Beauchamp had hinted that it seemed hardly worth while for her to go again that term, at all. But the kindly old doctor, seeing that Monica's heart was set upon it, had said: "Oh, yes, it will do her good to rub up against the other girls for a week or two. The holidays will be quite long enough, seven weeks or more." And so it was settled that, as soon as the ankle was really to be depended

upon, Monica should go back to finish out the term.

She was thinking of it a few days later, as she kept her grandmother company in the drawing-room after tea. The old lady had seemed much less stiff lately, and Monica had begun to think that she might grow fond of her in time. She was so kind, too, about Jack, who was allowed to be wherever his mistress was, even in the drawing-room; certainly he was a particularly good dog. He was lying on the hearth-rug now, fast asleep, while Mrs. Beauchamp was knitting some fleecy wool into a wrap; and Monica, who was no longer compelled to keep her leg up, so long as she did not walk on it much, was lazily, and by no means elegantly, lounging in the depths of an easy chair.

Suddenly Jack pricked up his ears, and gave a short, sharp little bark, there was the sound of the front door opening and shutting, and the next minute "Miss Franklyn" was announced.

Mrs. Beauchamp greeted the visitor cordially. She had met Lois once before and had been prepossessed by the gentle tones and ladylike bearing of the doctor's eldest daughter.

Monica jumped up hastily, with a pleased exclamation, but she soon saw that something was wrong. There was a stern expression about Lois' lips which was not habitual to her, and she had brought a parcel, which Monica could see only too well contained books.

She scarcely responded to Monica's, "How do you do, Miss Franklyn?" but turned to Mrs. Beauchamp and began to explain her errand without delay.

"I am very sorry to have to draw your attention to these books, Mrs. Beauchamp," she said, laying a three-volume novel and another library book on an octagonal table beside her. "It seems that for some weeks--all the time your granddaughter has been laid up, at any rate--she has been lending Olive books of this description. I do not know whether Monica has your permission to read them, but it has been one of my dear mother's strictest rules that none of us should read any novel, except standard works, until we had left school; then we might do so if we wished. As it happens, neither my sister Kathleen, nor myself, has the slightest inclination for literature of *that* kind," and here Lois glanced contemptuously at the books, "but Olive seems to have been thoroughly infatuated with them. We have all noticed a great change in her lately, but could not account for it, until, by mere accident this afternoon, three of these books were found by one of the children, carefully hidden in an old doll's house which is rarely used. Seeing that it was useless to deny it, Olive has confessed to my mother the unhappy deceit that she has been practising, and produced the remaining book from her bedroom. She says she has been most miserable all the time, but was evidently frightfully fascinated, or she could never have been so wicked as to deceive our mother, who is very grieved and upset about it all. However, Olive has at length

promised solemnly not to read any more of this kind of book, and I believe she will keep her word, unless she is tempted. That is why I have come to ask you to forbid Monica lending any more to Olive, if she is allowed to read them herself."

Lois paused, and Mrs. Beauchamp, after a glance at the title-pages of the books, looked severely at Monica, who had sat perfectly still, with her eyes fixed on Lois, during the recital of Olive's wrong-doing.

"How came you to get books of this description from the library, Monica?"

"You never forbade me to, grandmother," murmured the girl, more to gain time than anything else, for she had resolved to make a clean breast of it.

"More I did," admitted Mrs. Beauchamp ruefully. "I am afraid I never realised that you would choose this style of literature; I have thought of you as a mere child, still. Oh, dear me, what a terrible responsibility girls are!" And the old lady sighed feebly, and looked at Lois for assistance.

"Perhaps Monica will ask your advice in future," was all Lois could say, for she felt she was in a somewhat difficult position. "At any rate, for my mother's sake, I am sure she will promise not to help Olive to disobey her again."

The kind tone was too much for Monica, and she said impulsively: "Oh, Miss Franklyn, I am so awfully sorry! Olive never would have read one if I hadn't persuaded her to; she knew she ought not. I would give anything, now, not to have lent them to her. Indeed, last time she was here I told her so, and said I was half-inclined not to read any more myself."

[image]

"'OH, MISS FRANKLYN, I AM SO AWFULLY SORRY!'"

"I don't know what Mrs. Beauchamp's opinion may be," said Lois, to whose face Monica's honest avowal had brought a pleased expression, "but if you took *my* advice, Monica, you would make up your mind to be *quite* inclined to let them severely alone, for the next few years, at all events."

"I will," Monica replied, without hesitation; the reality in her tones betokening steadfastness of purpose.

"I am very glad," said Lois, and there was distinct approval in the expressive glance her grey eyes flashed on Monica, as she rose. "I will tell Olive of your resolve, and it will help her to be true to her promise."

Mrs. Beauchamp, looking alternately from one to the other, as the conversation seemed to be carried on without her help, suddenly realised that the question was settled, and she had no battle to fight with Monica. She could not help thinking how differently she would have gone to work, and how unsuccessful

she would, in all probability, have been.

"I am sure, Miss Franklyn, I hope that your mother will accept my apologies for all this trouble. There seems no end to the anxiety my granddaughter causes every one!"

"It *was* an anxiety to her, I must confess," said Lois, "but now that Olive has told her everything, she feels easier about it. She has such an abhorrence of anything approaching deceit."

"Of course," murmured Mrs. Beauchamp.

"Can Olive come to tea to-morrow, grandmother?" Monica's face was pleading.

"I really don't know, I'm sure. I hardly think you deserve----" began the old lady hesitatingly.

"May I interrupt?" said Lois, quickly. "I was to tell you that my mother felt that the most suitable punishment she could inflict upon Olive was to forbid her to see Monica again until she returns to school, whenever that may be."

And although Monica said, "Oh!" and looked disconsolate, she could not but admit that the punishment was a just one.

CHAPTER XIII.

"A NICE SCRAPE SHE'LL GET INTO!"

"Monica Beauchamp is back at school."

The news soon spread, until all the Fourth Form girls were aware of the fact, and, for the most part, it was received with acclamation, for the bright, high-spirited girl had been missed during the month she had been away.

There was only one little clique who regretted her return, and that was Lily Howell and her votaries who, knowing she had a rooted objection to the newcomer, took their cue from their leader, and looked upon Monica as an interloper; but it must be confessed that, personally, they had no fault to find with her, except that the absolute indifference with which she treated them annoyed them terribly.

During recreation, when Olive would fain have had Monica all to herself, several of the girls, in other forms besides her own, gathered round her, and made quite a fuss of her. This of course did not escape Lily's notice, who, remembering one occasion when she had returned to school after a slight illness, and no one had expressed any pleasure at seeing her back again, was frightfully jealous of

Monica.

But the chief reason why she was sorry to see Monica at school once more was because she knew that, with Monica in the arithmetic class, her own chance of coming out first in the examination was decidedly lessened. There were only two studies which Monica had any real interest in, and those were German and arithmetic; the former because she had a very fair idea of the language, and the latter she thoroughly enjoyed and consequently took pains with.

Up to the half-term, Monica had kept her place steadily, much to Lily's mortification, who had always been praised for her neatly worked examples, until Monica appeared upon the scene, with her less tidy, but far more quick and correct work. But the month she had been away provided Lily with a grand opportunity of getting ahead; and she had worked with a zeal, worthy of a better cause, to endeavour to supplant Monica.

Great was her chagrin, then, to find upon a new rule being explained by Miss Churchill, that Monica was well acquainted with it, and had worked out a given example, and got the right answer, before the problem had thoroughly penetrated Lily's brain. She did not know that Monica had spent many hours amusing herself with her *Hamblin Smith* while she had been laid up at home, and so had got far ahead of what the Fourth Form was still doing.

"Very good indeed, Monica! You have worked that out well," commended Miss Churchill, as she looked at the sum; and Monica flushed with pleasure at words of praise such as she seldom had received before.

During that last fortnight of the summer term, she tried her very hardest to have a neat exercise book, as well as correct answers, but it was uphill work for Monica, whose home-lessons were invariably blotted and smudged, and the lines anything but straightly ruled. However, Miss Churchill, quick to notice and commend real effort, encouraged her several times with a word of praise. None of these escaped Lily Howell's ears, and she felt more convinced than ever that Monica was deliberately aiming at supplanting her in the forthcoming examination. No such idea had entered Monica's head; she was merely actuated by a desire to please Miss Churchill, and arithmetic was the only subject (of those taught by her) for which Monica had any liking. In English subjects and science she was a terrible pupil, and she was continually getting into trouble on account of carelessly written, or insufficiently learnt, work; but as it was just at the end of the term, and she had been away so long, she was let off more easily than she really deserved.

At length the examination week dawned, and those girls who were keen about their place in the class list spent all their spare time in cramming. Amethyst Drury, whose talents lay in the direction of English history and geography, was continually on the look out for some one to hear her say her "dates," and ask her

questions about Africa, the country they were to be examined upon that term. Elsa, who, among others, was what their teacher called an "all-round girl," knew it was hopeless to try to look up everything, so she depended upon the knowledge she had gained during the term; by far the wisest plan. Olive, who seldom did well in any subject, on account of carelessness and inattention, expected to "get along somehow"; the only distinction she ever obtained was for drawing, and as she certainly had a real gift in that direction she was universally acknowledged to be the artist of the class.

It would be impossible, as well as unnecessary, to describe in detail the varied experiences of the examination week. Suffice it to say that the questions, according to the girls' opinions, were "harder than ever," and the candidates were none too hopeful when they gave up their papers, after a couple of hours' work upon each subject; somehow just the questions they had made sure Miss So-and-So would set had not been included, and the very things they had fondly hoped would not be required had been given a prominent place! But that is an experience common to all time, and by no means peculiar to the girls of that Fourth Form.

The arithmetic examination was almost the last on the list. And most of the girls who had expended their energies on previous subjects looked with dismay at the long list of difficult examples. Olive glanced at the others to see what they thought of it, but Elsa was beginning to write steadily, and Monica, catching her eye, gave her a reassuring smile; it seemed rather a nice paper to her. Amethyst, who was no mathematician, was biting the end of her penholder and looking frantic.

Olive was just going to dip her pen in the ink and begin to inscribe her name elaborately on the top sheet of the ruled paper before her, when something made her look in Lily Howell's direction just in time to see an ugly expression of malignant jealousy sweep over her face, as she observed Monica steadily applying herself to answer the questions which appalled her rival.

"There'll be awful ructions in that quarter, if Monica comes out top, as I do hope she will," soliloquised Olive, and then a reproving glance from Miss Churchill warned her to get on with her work.

For an hour no sound was heard but the scratching of pens and the rustling of paper, except now and then when a long-drawn sigh escaped the lips of one or other of the girls, as she realised her inability to solve a difficult problem.

By that time Olive had come to the end of her resources and could do no more, so she fastened her papers together and then began to look about at the other girls with a view to seeing how they were getting on. Her desk was in one corner of the room, and Monica (who long since had had to be moved to a distance from Olive, on account of whispering) was in the centre of the second row quite

near the front. Lily Howell and her ally, Maggie Masters, were next to each other in the opposite corner from Olive's.

A glance at Monica showed her to be still hard at work over her paper, so Olive turned her attention elsewhere. As she looked across at Lily, their eyes met, and Olive turned away quickly, for she did not want to get into trouble with Miss Churchill, who might think they were communicating with each other in some way; but a peculiar expression she had seen in Lily's light grey orbs impelled her to look again a few seconds later, and then what she saw horrified her, and her eyes seemed rooted to the spot! For Lily was positively making copious use of the contents of some little note-book or paper, (Olive could not detect which) that was cleverly hidden, on the desk, by Maggie's pencil-box, from Miss Churchill's view.

"The horrid, mean, hateful sneak!" Olive, in her anger and contempt could not find enough opprobrious epithets. "She's got all her tables, and a whole lot of hints copied out, I do believe, and of course, now she'll go and beat Monica; but I'll be even with her! A nice scrape she'll get into!" And Olive chuckled to herself at the thought of what was in store. "Perhaps she'll be expelled, and a good job, too. I'd better nudge Gipsy, and make her see, in case the sneak goes and declares she didn't cheat."

Olive glanced over into the other corner again, but--nothing wrong was to be seen! All trace of the notes had vanished, and Lily was neatly ruling her manuscript paper as if no such thing as cheating had ever entered her head!

"Oh, you wretch!" And Olive felt as if she could have done anything to her, so exasperated was she to think that she had been "done"; for not once again, during the time that remained for the arithmetic paper, did she catch a glimpse of the missing paper. At length the gong sounded, and whether completed or not, the girls had to fasten their sheets together and hand the papers in to Miss Churchill.

They were glad enough to stretch their cramped limbs, and let their tongues loose during the recreation that followed, in discussing the questions and comparing their answers. Olive, of course, told Monica what she had seen Lily doing, and how vexed she was to think she could not prove it to Miss Churchill, if she were to tell her.

"Oh, let it be," said Monica, who loathed telling tales; "she'll be so mad if you tell, and she'll be sure to declare it wasn't a crib."

"I shall tell if she comes out top."

And Monica could not persuade her otherwise.

"We shall know to-morrow," said Olive as they entered the school door.

But in less than five minutes after the words had escaped her lips, part of the truth had come to light, and it happened in this way.

Lily (who was under the impression that her neat little scheme for aiding her memory had been quite unobserved by any one except Maggie, who had benefited by it, too), already, in imagination, saw her own name at the head of the list. But she thought it would be just as well to make assurance doubly sure, by securing Monica's downfall, if it were possible, in case she should be perilously near. So, as she passed up to the desk with her paper, taking care to be the last girl who filed out, she very quietly dropped her little paper of tables, etc., on the floor of Monica's desk, in such a manner as to make it appear as if it had slipped off Monica's lap, when she rose to go out.

"Now we shall be quits!" was her amiable thought, as she went with the rest into the playground. She bound Maggie, with promises of many good things, to absolute secrecy, and returned to the classroom to await developments.

The girls had no sooner taken their places than they became aware that something was wrong! The head-mistress Miss Buckingham came in with a very stern expression on her face, and Miss Churchill seemed on the verge of tears.

"I am grieved to tell you that there is a cheat--yes, a *cheat*," and Miss Buckingham repeated the words with scornful emphasis, "amongst you girls of the Fourth Form. Miss Churchill found this paper, containing arithmetical tables and various other information, under one of the desks when you had left the classroom. I desire that girl, who has sought to secure a good place in the examination list by such despicable means to stand up in her place."

A furtive glance from Lily, who was as white as a ghost, revealed the fact that the head-mistress was looking straight at Monica, and the real culprit breathed freely, and the colour came back to her cheeks. She did not know that Olive's gaze was riveted on her, or she would not have felt so easy in her mind as she did!

"Come, stand up," repeated Miss Buckingham, and Monica began to feel uncomfortable. Why did the head-mistress look so persistently at *her*, when it was Lily Howell who was the culprit.

"Well, I am sorry she will not confess it herself," said the calm, cold voice of the head of the school; "but Monica Beauchamp is the cheat!"

"I'm *not*!"

"She *isn't*!"

The two disclaimers burst simultaneously from the lips of Monica and Olive, who were aghast at this fresh piece of trickery, and could not imagine how it had come to pass.

"Olive Franklyn, sit down. Now, Monica, what have you to say in defence of yourself?"

"I know nothing whatever about it; I would scorn such a mean trick. Miss Churchill knows I would," and Monica looked reproachfully at the little mistress,

who had been a sad and silent spectator, so far.

"I cannot believe you would cheat, Monica, but----" and she paused significantly.

Meanwhile, Olive had been frantically trying to make Monica see her, but failing to do so, she asked permission to speak, and told what she had seen on Lily's desk.

But both Lily and Maggie stoutly denied having had anything of the kind in their possession, and, as no other girl seemed to have observed it, Miss Churchill was reluctantly compelled to think that Olive, in championing her friend's cause, was drawing on her imagination. The figures and words on the paper were all in printing hand, so that no one's writing was recognisable.

No more light being thrown on the matter by further questioning, Miss Buckingham left the classroom, saying: "I shall not decide upon the punishment to be given until to-morrow morning, by which time I sincerely hope that the girl, whose conscience must be accusing her, will be ready to make confession."

In her own mind, Miss Buckingham was of opinion that Monica Beauchamp was entirely innocent; and she could not but feel that suspicion strongly rested upon Lily Howell, although the latter had feigned entire ignorance of the matter; for her changing colour belied her words.

The truth was arrived at in a singular and indisputable way after all.

When correcting the arithmetic papers, late that afternoon, in the teacher's room, Miss Churchill found some most astonishing blunders in Lily Howell's calculations. For some time she was mystified, and then it dawned upon her what had happened.

"Why, the girl's cubic measure is all wrong. No less than three times she has put down 1278 cubic inches instead of 1728, when reckoning a cubic foot. It is curious how she came to transpose the numbers? I wonder----"

She hastened across the hall to Miss Buckingham's room, and upon looking at the "crib," she saw, with a curious sense of satisfaction (for she felt sure Monica was innocent) that underneath "Solid or Cubic Measure" the first line, was

1278 cub. in. = 1 cub. ft.

"Found out!" she murmured, and recrossing the hall, she told two of the other teachers, who were also correcting papers, what she had discovered, and bade them look at the paper, and compare it with Lily's sums.

They both agreed it was a very clear case, and when, upon examination, Monica was found to have calculated her cubic inches rightly each time, no further proof of Lily Howell's guilt was needed.

Little did that individual dream of what awaited her on the morrow, when she retired to rest that night, rather well satisfied with the success which she thought she had achieved.

The girls waited breathlessly next morning for Miss Buckingham's verdict; many had been the conversations about it, and very varied were the punishments suggested. Every one was sure that, somehow, Lily would be proved guilty, most of them thinking that she would voluntarily confess.

Monica, knowing she was quite innocent, felt no real fear, although she was not at all sure that she would escape punishment, for she was under the impression that Miss Buckingham had believed her to be the culprit.

Every one was amazed when they heard the conclusion of the matter. In a few terse words the head-mistress explained how the truth had been brought to light; and no one felt that undue punishment was being meted out to Lily Howell when she was informed that after that term she would not be allowed to return to the Osmington High School.

"Not only for the using of unfair and forbidden means in order to secure a good place in the examination list, but far more on account of the wicked intention to bring discredit and punishment upon an innocent fellow-schoolgirl."

Miss Buckingham's words were stern and uncompromising, and poor unhappy Lily Howell cowered beneath her glance.

It was an unfortunate ending to the term, and the girls who came off victorious in the examinations did not feel the same satisfaction as they would have done if nothing of the kind had occurred. Monica, of course, was first in arithmetic; Amethyst secured a similar place in English history, and although she was beaten in geography, she did not mind so very much, as the honours fell to her friend Elsa.

A few days more, and the huge pile of buildings which constituted the Osmington High School was left in the charge of caretakers, for governesses and pupils alike had scattered in every direction to enjoy the long, summer vacation.

CHAPTER XIV.

"SUNDAY AGAIN ALREADY!"

"Oh, isn't it simply glorious?"

"How beautiful the sea looks!"

Sundry exclamations such as these escaped the lips of most of the passengers in the heavily laden train bound for Sandyshore, as it emerged from a tunnel with a shrill whistle, and rounded the last corner prior to slowing down. A beautiful panorama stretched out before them; in the foreground lay the quaint old town, beyond that an expanse of deep, blue sea, and in the distance the white, rocky peaks of some promontory seemed almost dazzling in the brilliance of an August sun.

Two out of three young people in a reserved second-class compartment were in ecstasies of delight; and the third was contemplating a month at Sandyshore, with very different feelings from those she had expressed a couple of months ago. For Monica had obtained her wish, and she would have Olive as her companion and friend during all that holiday month.

It had not been quite easy to gain Mrs. Franklyn's consent to let Olive accompany the Beauchamp party; especially after the trouble about the novel-reading, but eventually she had consented, upon both Monica and Olive promising her faithfully not to cause her distress in that way again. And when Mrs. Beauchamp insisted upon Elsa going with them too, she and the doctor very gladly availed themselves of the kindness and generosity which would enable their twin-daughters to have such a thorough holiday and change, free of expense.

Monica had, at first, demurred a little over having Elsa, saying "two's company, and three's none," but her grandmother was firm. For one thing, Mrs. Beauchamp thought it would be just as well to have Elsa, on account of her trustworthiness, and the old lady was a trifle afraid of Olive getting into mischief without her more sensible sister being near by. Also she had a desire to know more of the gentle-mannered girl, and quite looked forward to enjoying her bright young society, when the other two girls were bent on following their own devices. So Monica had, perforce, to fall in with her grandmother's wishes, and when it was known that Mr. Drury was acting as locum-tenens of the quaint old church of St. Mary, Sandyshore, everything seemed to fit in splendidly.

As it happened, the Drurys preceded their friends by a couple of days. So Amethyst was at the station to meet the girls when they arrived. She had never been to Sandyshore before, and was captivated with the dear little old-fashioned town, as all its summer visitors were. Her merry tongue rattled away about all its charms and wonders while Barnes counted up the huge dress-baskets, trunks, and other articles of luggage belonging to the party, and engaged a couple of cabs to convey them to their destination.

At length, all was satisfactorily accomplished, and, with arrangements for an early meeting, Amethyst saw them drive off into the town, and then ran home to the quaint, rambling old vicarage, next to the church, which the Drurys were occupying.

Meanwhile, after a few minutes' drive through the narrow-streeted town, and up a very steep hill, "Mrs. Beauchamp and party" (according to the "Sandyshore Visitors' List") arrived at "Rocklands," a large house, standing in its own grounds, overlooking the entire bay.

Mrs. Beauchamp always engaged rooms at that particular house, owing to the magnificent view which she could enjoy, simply by sitting comfortably ensconced in one or other of the bay windows; for, in one direction, Rocklands overlooked the pier, to and from which pleasure steamers were continually passing; and when one tired of these, the sands, thickly sprinkled with bathing machines and private tents, amused and interested the onlooker with their varied phases of holiday life.

Comfort being of more importance than expense to Mrs. Beauchamp, she had made every arrangement for convenience during their month's stay at Rocklands by engaging a whole suite of rooms. Thus Elsa and Olive were charmed to find themselves the proud possessors of a delightful bedroom, while Monica occupied the one next to theirs. Seldom were their doors shut; it was such a new experience for Monica to have young companions to live with. Then the dining-room in which they had all their meals was entirely at the girls' disposal, between times, when they could do just as they pleased, and "need not be so much on their best behaviour," as Monica termed it, as in the drawing-room. But the weather was so delightful, and so seldom did it rain, that the trio were not often to be found indoors except in the evenings.

The next morning, the whole party were early on the small strip of shore, which extended for fully half a mile round the bay, and on which the visitors made themselves thoroughly at home. The short season was at its height, and at first sight there seemed no chance of securing a comfortable position; but as they walked along the Shore Road, looking down upon the gay throng of holiday-makers, Elsa descried a well-known figure, and saw Amethyst frantically signalling to them.

"There seems room there, Mrs. Beauchamp," she suggested, "where the Drurys are. Shall we go down?"

And in a few minutes, after mutual greetings, Mrs. Beauchamp was comfortably settled in her deck chair, while the girls, spreading a rug on the sand, threw themselves down upon it in careless attitudes.

That first morning was but a sample of most of those which followed.

Mrs. Beauchamp read, or chatted with Mr. and Mrs. Drury, while the young people enjoyed themselves in every way. A tent, next to the one used by the Drurys, was hired, and the girls had great fun over bathing. Mrs. Beauchamp wished Monica to learn to swim, so an old bathing-machine proprietor, one of the chief features of Sandyshore, used to give her and Olive a lesson every morning.

Elsa was too timid to really enjoy more of the sea than could be had where the water was comparatively shallow, and Amethyst and she were quite content to look on at the more daring exploits of the other two girls.

Such fun and merriment did they all have that first week at Sandyshore, that it did not seem possible that they *could* enjoy themselves more, although Amethyst's one cry was: "Won't it be just too perfectly lovely when Marcus comes?"

Marcus Drury, Amethyst's brother and senior by four or five years, had only recently gone up to Cambridge upon leaving Trent College. He had been spending a few weeks of the Long Vacation with another undergraduate at the latter's home in Scotland, but now he was expected to arrive at Sandyshore any day, and his devoted and admiring little sister was on the tiptoe of excitement about his coming. Of course, he was well known to the Franklyn girls, with whose brothers he had been friendly since the Drurys had lived at Osmington, but Monica felt a good deal of interest in the young fellow of whom she had heard so much.

Therefore, one morning, some ten days after their arrival at Sandyshore, when Amethyst came flying along the Shore Road to meet them with the words, "Marcus has come, and you'll never guess who is with him!" all three girls were quite as mystified as she wished them to be.

"No one I know," said Monica, with decision.

"No, you don't; but the others do." And Amethyst bubbled over with excitement. "Do be quick and guess: I can't keep it much longer."

"Not Dick?" hazarded Elsa, more to please her friend than because she expected to be right.

"No, not Dick," said Amethyst merrily. "Try again."

"Roger, then," said Olive.

"Yes, yes, yes! Isn't it splendid? He wanted to surprise you, and he's got a week's holiday from St. Adrian's, and Marcus met him in the Strand, or somewhere, and persuaded him to pack up and come down here with him."

"Oh, how lovely!" cried the twins simultaneously; "do let us see him. Where is he?"

"There," and Amethyst triumphantly pointed out a couple of young fellows not very far away, who had evidently been enjoying, from a distance, the surprise the news had caused.

Monica, feeling somewhat out of it, followed the others rather more slowly, and thus secured a good look at the newcomers while they were engaged in greeting Olive and Elsa.

There was no doubt as to which was which: the elder, of medium height, slightly built, dark, with brown eyes, was a Franklyn all over; while his companion, a tall, broad-shouldered youth, with merry blue eyes and curly hair, although

he was not in the least like his sister, bore an unmistakable resemblance to Mr. Drury.

Raising his panama hat, round which his college colours were twisted, he came forward with outstretched hand, and Monica thought she had never liked any one so well, at first sight, as this debonair undergraduate. She had previously somewhat sneered at Amethyst's praises of her paragon brother, but she could understand her feelings now that she had met Marcus Drury.

She almost forgot his companion, until a quiet, manly voice, so different from the other's boyish tones, said, "How do you do, Miss Beauchamp? I am very glad to meet my sister's friend." And she found herself shaking hands with Olive's eldest brother.

A very short time sufficed to put them all at their ease, and then, as the tide was fast going out, they went in different directions for their bathe. But an hour later found the young people all together again, and the girls were charmed with the proposal that they should go for a row, there being just an hour left before dinner.

Mr. and Mrs. Drury, who had undertaken to keep Mrs. Beauchamp company until their return, watched the boatful with interest, until Roger's and Marcus' even strokes had rowed it so far as to be scarcely more than a speck.

"Dear boy," murmured Mrs. Drury, as she took up the knitting she had neglected; and her husband smiled as he said, quizzically: "Do you mean Roger?"

"I meant Marcus, of course," replied his wife, with a smile, "but Roger is a dear boy, too. I only wish----"

"What do you wish, Nora?" queried her husband, in a lower tone, as he tilted his black straw hat over his eyes, to protect them from the glare of the midday sun.

"Why, the same as I know you wish, Herbert," was the reply, "that in choosing the medical profession Roger had been actuated by the one desire to follow in the steps of the Good Physician."

"Yes, I would that he had, but I fear it was not so. But, Nora, motives and hearts, too, can be changed. Why should not Roger Franklyn go back to St. Adrian's 'transformed'?"

"Ah! why not?" And little Mrs. Drury's eyes grew earnest, as she looked out at the tiny black speck dancing on the ocean in the distance, and she prayed that God would answer that other mother's prayers, and give to Roger a new purpose, a new ideal in life.

The days flew swiftly by, what with picnics, tennis, bathing, boating, and many other amusements and enjoyments, and Sunday dawned.

Monica and Olive, it must be confessed, did not appreciate that one day in the week as much as they should, inasmuch as they were compelled, of necessity,

to forego during its sacred hours all the secular amusements with which they filled up every moment of the week, from Monday morning until Saturday evening. They awoke that brilliant August morning to the unwelcome remembrance that it was "Sunday again already!"

But Elsa, whose happiest hours were spent in God's house, with a tender little smile hovering round her lips, drew up the blinds, and looked out upon the calm blue sea, and lifted her heart in thanksgiving to her Heavenly Father for making such a beautiful world. Even Olive's ceaseless chatter, as they dressed, did not disturb her; and when her sister had gone into Monica's room, as she invariably did, Elsa gently shut the door, and taking her little Bible, she knelt by the open window and prayed long and earnestly. She did not know how to pray properly, she only knew how to talk to her dearest Friend, and she was accustomed to tell Him everything, and ask with the simplicity and directness of a little child for what she needed.

That morning, after praying for help and strength for herself, to enable her to be a faithful follower of her Master, she remembered her darling mother (whom it had been a very real sorrow to leave) and all those at home; and then her heart seemed overwhelmed with the thought of those about her, who, as yet, did not know and serve her Saviour. "Oh! Lord," she prayed, "do speak to-day, *somehow*, to Monica and Olive. I can't bear to think of them going on living without Thee. And kind Mrs. Beauchamp wants something to satisfy her. O Lord, she wants *Thee*! and Roger needs Thee, too. Lord, show Thyself to them all to-day, and show them they will never be happy until they have come to Thee."

Thus, in all earnestness, but with childish simplicity, Elsa poured out her heart unto the Lord, and "the Lord hearkened and heard."

The dear old-fashioned church, taxed to its utmost to provide accommodation for the throngs of fashionably attired people who poured ceaselessly up the aisles, as the five-minute bell gave warning that service would soon commence, was eventually crammed with a huge congregation, made up of many types. Perhaps it would be safe to say that the majority of the people assembled within the sacred edifice had gone there because "it was the proper thing to do"; they neither expected nor desired any spiritual help.

Among this class were several of our acquaintances. In one pew, a prominent one, because the verger had an eye to a substantial sum for the offertory from such an imposing looking personage as Mrs. Beauchamp, in her trailing gown of black satin, and a Parisian bonnet, were seated the two Franklyn girls, Monica and her grandmother; Elsa being next to the old lady.

At a little distance, and at right angles to them, at the end of the vicarage pew in the south transept, Marcus' tall form towered above those in the vicinity, and made his neighbour, Roger Franklyn, look quite insignificant; also Mrs. Drury

and Amethyst. It is to be feared that some of the occupants of the two pews were a trifle disposed to look at each other, at first; but a glance from her mother subdued Amethyst, and she soon forgot the others in paying attention to the service.

Marcus, who had a tenor voice, which promised to be of unusual quality, sang all the chants and hymns; but Roger, a slightly cynical expression disfiguring his clear-cut features, took no part in the service. With arms folded, and head erect, he stood looking straight before him, his eyes wandering, occasionally, to the pew in which his sisters sat; but he did not look at them so much as at their friend.

Monica, her softly rounded cheeks already tanned by exposure to sun and sea, was looking really handsome that morning. Her hair, arranged in a new and becoming fashion, was tied back with a large cream bow, which matched her flop hat and daintily made dress. The only scrap of colour about her was a couple of dark crimson roses, tucked carelessly into her waistband; and altogether she made a very pretty picture, standing, as she did, erect and tall, between the twins, who wore simple delaine frocks of a pale greenish hue.

Mr. Drury conducted the service, and a young clergyman, apparently a curate, read the lessons. Elsa, with a sinking heart, saw the latter ascend the pulpit stairs; for it must be confessed she had hoped her favourite, Mr. Drury, would be the preacher. But she need not have feared; God had given Leslie Herschel a message to deliver to the congregation assembled at St. Mary's Church that August Sunday morning, and as the young man looked down upon the throbbing mass of never-dying souls, his heart went up to God that many there that morning might be led to make the one great choice.

CHAPTER XV.

"OH, MONICA, DON'T!"

"My text you will find in the First Book of Chronicles, the twenty-ninth chapter and the fifth verse. 'Who then is willing to consecrate his service this day unto the Lord'?"

The young preacher, for he had been barely two years in orders, read the verse once, and yet again, feelingly, and as if he would impress every word of it upon his hearers, and then he closed his Bible, and began his sermon.

It was not a very long one; indeed there were a few who wished it had been

half as long again. It was not by any means a brilliant peroration, but yet there were points about it which made it the most remarkable sermon to which many of his hearers had ever listened. And that last word gives the key to the whole thing; they *had* to listen! Whether they liked it or not (and many, very many, did not at all appreciate the home-truths which they heard), some unseen and uncontrollable impulse forced them to listen, even against their will. The earnest, ringing tones of the young preacher, his dark eyes, which seemed to penetrate their very motives and thoughts, stirred the apathetic indifference of that nominally Christian congregation; and they realised, some of them for the first time, that the service of God was a very real and tangible thing, and that they had, so far, had no part or lot in the matter.

Leslie Herschel dwelt first upon the Master, then upon the service itself, and finally upon those who were called to serve, and when and how that service should be rendered.

"My friends," he said, in conclusion, "I claim your service, whole-hearted, faithful, loyal service, to-day, for my Master. He will force none, coerce no one into rendering unloving obedience, but He pleads with you to-day to come with willing hearts and offer Him your best. And what does He promise in return? Peace, joy, hope, satisfaction in this life, and eternal life in the world to come. I ask you, are you content to do without Him? Is this world, pleasant and attractive though it be, so satisfying that you need nothing more than the gaiety, the success, the honour, aye, and the gold which it offers to some, but by no means all of its devotees? But supposing you *are* satisfied now (and I very much doubt if there exists a single individual who is absolutely satisfied), will you be satisfied, think you, when you come to stand, all unprepared, in the presence of your Judge? Will this world stand you in good stead *then*?" And the preacher leaned over the pulpit, while with searching glance his eyes seemed to scan every one of the disturbed faces before him. "The Bible tells me that 'this world passeth away.' What will it advantage you, *then*, whether you have moved in a select circle, or not? Whether you have acquired fame and distinction, or not? Whether you have been known among men as almost a millionaire, or not? Oh! my friends, I beseech you, with all earnestness, that you will *this day* choose the Lord Christ for your Master.

"It is an old, but true, saying, that 'To-morrow never comes'; we are only sure of to-day, therefore 'Choose ye this day whom ye will serve,' and say: 'Behold, Thy servants are ready to do whatsoever my Lord the King shall appoint.'

"I do not, I dare not, promise you a path of ease and luxury, but I *can* say, for I have proved it, that the life which has Christ as its Alpha and Omega is the only truly happy one, the only life worth living. And that word 'whatsoever,' if you really mean what you say, may entail the giving up of many a cherished plan, many a life-long project. It may mean going to China or Africa as a medical

missionary for one; to face the misery and horrors of life among the denizens of the East End for another; to live a Christlike life in a worldly and uncongenial atmosphere for a third.

"But in it all, and through it all, Christ's never-failing arm will guide and uphold you, and His voice will be heard, saying: 'Behold, I come quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give every man according as his work shall be.' '*Who*, then, is willing to consecrate his service *this day* unto the Lord?' May God in His mercy grant that from many a heart in this church this morning the cry may go up to Him, 'O Lord ... *I* am willing.'"

The strains of the organ, on which the opening bars of that beautiful consecration hymn:

> Take my life, and let it be
> Consecrated, Lord, to Thee,

were being exquisitely played by the organist, accentuated rather than disturbed the hush of solemnity which had fallen upon the congregation, as the young preacher concluded his earnest appeal for personal dedication; and there were undoubtedly several that morning who, realising the claim which Christ had upon them, willingly surrendered all to Him.

The Beauchamp and Drury parties met in the quaint old churchyard, and the two elder ladies walked slowly on, while the young people waited about for Mr. Drury.

"A wonderful sermon, was it not?" said Mrs. Drury.

"Ye--es; but rather too dictatorial in style for such a young preacher." Mrs. Beauchamp's tones expressed dissatisfaction.

"Did you think it dictatorial?" enquired the vicar's wife pleasantly; "it did not strike me in that way. I thought it was a grand opportunity, splendidly seized. With such a varied congregation, coming as we do from all parts of England, no one but God can foresee the results that may accrue, with His blessing, from the faithful message this morning."

"Perhaps so," was Mrs. Beauchamp's somewhat absent reply; and she turned back as if to wait for the girls.

Amethyst and Elsa were close at hand, and quickly joined them, but Monica and Olive were some distance behind, walking slowly, and apparently deep in conversation. Mrs. Drury, who had not been unobservant of the effect of the sermon upon Monica, as she sat listening, listlessly at first, and then was roused into paying startled attention to the (to her) unusual discourse, tactfully drew her own child and Elsa into conversation, as they walked on. For she was sure, from the expressions on the faces of the girls behind, that they were discussing what

they had been hearing.

As a matter of fact, after a few commonplaces with Marcus and Roger, the girls left them, and slowly following the others, had been silent companions for a few moments.

Then Olive, shaking off the unwelcome feelings which had taken possession of her, said gaily: "A penny for your thoughts, Monica!"

"You can have them without the penny," was her friend's rather sad reply, as she slipped her arm into Olive's. "I'm half inclined to do what he said, Ollie."

Olive raised a startled face to Monica's, and read quite a new expression upon it, in which there was a certain amount of determination. "What do you mean?" she queried; but in her own heart she knew full well what Monica meant.

"Why, to say *I* am willing," said Monica, with some confusion, for she felt diffident about expressing what she meant even to her greatest friend.

"Oh, Monica, don't! We'll never have any more good times together," said Olive, and it must have been her bad angel who prompted her words; "if you do you'll have to leave me behind, for *I'm* not going to give in."

"I wish I could live like he said," and Monica's face looked wistful. "Sometimes I----"

"Well?"

"Sometimes I long to be able to write and tell dad that it is all settled. He *would* be so glad."

"Well, I don't see much in it," said Olive obstinately. Her better feelings were aroused by Monica's words, but she deliberately crushed them down.

"Oh, yes, there is; there's *everything* in it! You've only to look at that young clergyman, and your mother, and even Elsa, to see what a difference there is. Oh, Olive, if I had your mother to help me I *would*, really, say to God what we sang just now,

Take myself, and I will be
Ever, only, all for Thee"--

and Monica's young face glowed with feeling.

"No, you wouldn't," was Olive's moody reply, "any more than I do. Of course, I mean to be a Christian some day, but not while I'm only a girl; I want some pleasure first."

"Oh, Olive, Olive, you little know the dark cloud that even now is beginning to gather over your head!"

With a sigh, Monica turned away, and, with one consent, they hurried after the others, and no more was said. But the elder girl's heart had been roused and awakened, and never again would she drift into her former state of indifference.

The two young fellows, waiting about in the churchyard for Mr. Drury, at length received a message to the effect that he would be detained still longer, and they had better not wait for him. So they, too, strolled down to the Shore Road, where they knew they would eventually come across their friends.

"I'm almost sorry I'm not in your shoes, old man," said Marcus, as he adapted his long, swinging strides to his friend's shorter steps.

"It's a very good thing that you are a little undecided about it," was Roger's somewhat enigmatical reply. "But tell me what you mean?"

"Why, I felt this morning as if I would give anything to go in for medicine, with a view to going abroad; but I know father has set his heart on my taking orders."

"If I remember rightly, the preacher distinctly observed that the service was not to be one of picking and choosing but a case of 'whatsoever.'"

Something unusual about the tone in which Roger made this remark, and a total absence of his usual cynicism, made his friend glance curiously at him, and he realised that a change, undefinable at present, but nevertheless unmistakable, had taken place in Roger Franklyn.

"I say, old chap, I wish with all my heart *you* would be a 'Whatsoever Christian,'" he said impulsively.

"With God's help I mean to be," was the unexpected reply, as Roger lifted his hat, and glanced upward, as if registering a vow.

"Thank God!" was Marcus' low but fervent response, as he gripped his friend's hand with such force as to make him wince.

"I knew you would be glad," was the quiet reply, "and so will my dearest mother; she has been praying a long time for her eldest boy, and he has been very obstinate. But I shall need all your prayers, now, for already I foresee trouble and disappointment looming in the distance. The pater is expecting me to follow in his footsteps when I leave St. Adrian's, but I--oh! Drury, I am sure those words were meant for me this morning. There was probably not another medical student in the church, and I felt called to offer myself to Him for foreign service, if He will accept me."

"You need not doubt His acceptance, old fellow. When we give what God asks for, you may be very sure He takes it. How glad Herschel will be!"

"Who is Herschel?" ask Roger quickly.

"Why, this morning's preacher. Did not you hear father talking about him last night? No? Oh, then I must tell you. He is staying down here with his mother and a sister, I believe, and father met him yesterday, some time. Leslie Herschel's father (the late Dean of Balmore) and he were great friends, so he was awfully glad to come across him, and asked him, straight off, to preach this morning. He has had a curacy in some huge mining town, but he is going out to the Soudan

this autumn."

"It's marvellous how God makes things fit in," remarked young Franklyn, with rather an embarrassed laugh; it was such a new thing for *him* to be talking in that strain. "I suppose, humanly speaking, Mr. Drury might have preached a hundred sermons and they would never have touched me; but just this one, from an utter stranger, *did*. And if he had been here either last Sunday, or next, instead of to-day, I should not have heard it!"

"There is a little chorus we undergrads sing sometimes, before we begin our Open-Airs, in Cambridge," said Marcus, "which runs thus--

'I believe God answers prayer.
I am sure God answers prayer.
I have proved God answers prayer.
Glory to His name.'"

"He certainly answered prayer for me this morning, and I'll trust Him for all the future."

Thus, Roger Franklyn, medical student, was "transformed"; and, in the course of a few days, he returned to his work at St. Adrian's, filled with a new purpose, governed by one desire, and one only, namely, to consecrate his service henceforth unto the Lord.

Mr. and Mrs. Drury's hearts were filled with thanksgiving when they heard of his conversion, and a smile irradiated Leslie Herschel's face when he was told of one result, at any rate, of his claim for service.

And Elsa: who can describe Elsa's joy, when, late that Sunday evening as her brother bade her "good-night" at Rocklands gate, he bent down and whispered his news in her ear? He knew well enough which of his twin sisters would be the one to rejoice with him, for Elsa's brave efforts to live a consistent Christian life in her own home had not been unobserved by her eldest brother.

"Oh, Roger, darling, how splendid!" and she clung tenderly to him. "*How* glad mamma will be when she hears; she has been praying for you so long. And I have, too," she added shyly.

"Dear little sister," he murmured, as he stooped and kissed her forehead. "Go on praying, Elsa, not only for me, but for Dick, and Olive, and the others."

Monica was strangely subdued all that Sunday. Twice Mrs. Beauchamp enquired if she were not well, but she replied that nothing ailed her. Elsa, who felt sure that she had been, in some way, influenced by the sermon, tried to muster sufficient courage to speak to her about it; but no opportunity occurred. Olive seemed determined never to leave Monica's side for a moment. So persistent

was she, that even Monica grew cross once, and said pettishly, "Do be quiet for a bit, Olive, I want to read." But if any one had taken the trouble to watch her movements, they would have seen that she rarely turned a page, although she appeared to be absorbed in her story.

In reality, Monica was thinking; good and evil were striving for the mastery within her, and she did not seem able to come to any decision. She longed to become a Christian, in her inmost heart, but something seemed to bar the way. At first, she could not think what the obstacle could be; but before she had lain down to rest that night, she knew that it was her friend, Olive, who was hindering her from taking the decisive step. Olive had said, "Oh, Monica, don't!" and although she knew that she was acting worse than foolishly, Monica decided not to make the great choice just then!

CHAPTER XVI.

"DO BE CAREFUL, GIRLS."

"Hurrah! Three cheers for mumsie!" cried Amethyst excitedly, one morning.

"What's up now?" enquired her brother, in a provokingly calm tone.

"Why, we're all going for a picnic to Gullane Head, father as well, for the whole day. Isn't it scrumptious?" And she danced about him in great glee.

"Very," he agreed, "but whom do you mean by 'all'? Four people scarcely constitute a picnic."

"Silly boy!" she retorted; "of course Monica and the Franklyns are coming. Mumsie arranged it all with Mrs. Beauchamp yesterday, only she would not say a word until this morning, in case it should not be fine. But there's no fear of rain to-day," and she glanced up at the deep blue sky, in which no speck of cloud was visible, with great satisfaction.

"How do you propose to get there?"

"Oh, father and you are to bicycle, and mother and we four girls are going in a waggonette."

"Is Mrs. Beauchamp going to bicycle, also?" asked Marcus, gravely. He was terribly fond of teasing his young sister.

"Oh, you dreadful boy! Of course not! She isn't going at all; it's too much of a real picnic for her to enjoy."

"I'm sorry Roger has gone," mused Marcus, as he began putting his Kodak

in order, with a view to some snap-shotting. "I wonder if Herschel would care to come."

He was soon striding up the quaint old street to the lodgings occupied by the Herschels. The town was very full, and rooms were at a premium, so that the Herschels had been glad to secure even such rooms as they had, in a very old-fashioned house, where the front door opened into the sitting-room, and when one sat in the low bay window, one seemed absolutely in the street.

Marcus, whistling a merry tune, paused a moment at the door, and then went by it, and tapped at the window. All the visitors acted in a very free-and-easy fashion at Sandyshore!

He was invited to "come in," and without more ado he walked into the sitting-room, where the remains of breakfast were still upon the table.

With apologies for intruding so early, Marcus shook hands with a sweet-looking widow lady, the depth of whose mourning betokened recent loss, and a tall slender girl, whose clear, grey eyes seemed too large for the fragile little face surrounded with an aureole of fair hair.

"I came to see if Herschel had any plans for to-day. If not, we are having a picnic at Gullane Head, about seven miles from here, and I wondered whether he would bicycle over with father and me."

"Do, Leslie; it will do you good," said his mother, as the young clergyman hesitated, and demurred about leaving them for a whole day, when his time with them was getting so short. "Robina and I have plenty to amuse ourselves with."

"Would you both join us?" asked Marcus. "Mother and the girls are going in a waggonette."

"Thank you very much, but I am afraid you must excuse us. Robina is not very strong, and it suits us best to have a lazy time by the sea." Mrs. Herschel smiled lovingly at her daughter, whose fair face flushed at the allusion to her health, for it was a sore trial to Robina Herschel that she had always to be taken care of, and shielded from every ill wind. But she bore her cross bravely, and no word of murmuring escaped her lips, although she was denied much that goes to make a girl's life happy.

"What time do you start, Drury?"

"Oh, 10.30, I believe; but come round to the vicarage directly you are ready, won't you?" and, excusing himself on the plea of having to pump up his tyres, Marcus hurried away.

It was a merry party that finally left the Vicarage, after various delays, that morning. For some time the three cyclists kept level with the waggonette, and Marcus teased Amethyst and the girls most unmercifully about ill-treating the poor horse by making him drag such heavy weights as they were, etc., etc.

"It isn't us, it's all the lunch we had to bring for you," cried Amethyst.

"Oh, indeed! You hear, mother? Be sure not to give my small sister so much as a crumb, because, upon her own confession, it's all been brought for me."

"Oh! isn't he tiresome, mumsie?" said his sister, with a little pout. She did not care to be made a laughing-stock of, and the others were all smiling.

"He's only teasing you, girlie; I wouldn't mind," said Mrs. Drury.

"Dick always goes on like that," put in Olive. "Brothers are an awful nuisance, but they 'keep a body alive,' as our old cook says."

"I wish I had one," said Monica wistfully, her glance following the merry young fellow who was now cycling along at a good rate, in order to pick up the two clerics, who were well ahead.

"I don't know what Mrs. Beauchamp would say to a troublesome grandson as well as a troublesome granddaughter," said Olive mischievously. But the words were scarcely out of her mouth before she wished she had not said them.

For Monica, drawing herself up, with one of her haughty airs, said sarcastically: "I am much obliged for your opinion of me, I am sure; especially as no one asked you for it."

"Oh, I only said it for fun," and Olive looked repentantly at her friend. But Monica chose to consider herself injured, and for some little time all the occupants of the waggonette felt a trifle uncomfortable.

But a halt was proclaimed soon after, and all the party dismounted, in order to go over a lighthouse which was situated about two-thirds of the way between Sandyshore and Gullane Head, and in the general interest resulting from an inspection of the wonderful mechanism, which the lighthouse keeper proudly explained to them, the little cloud blew over, and by the time their destination was reached, Olive and Monica were as good friends as ever.

Gullane Head, as the promontory which projected from the mainland was called, was an ideal place for picnics. There were several old caves, said to have been used as hiding-places for contraband goods years before; and the huge boulders which had evidently fallen at some time or other from the cavernous roofs made rough-and-ready chairs and tables, provided one was not too particular.

It was universally decided that it would be the best plan to have lunch first, as they were all hungry, and then devote a long afternoon to exploring the neighbourhood. So a particularly nice spot was chosen, and amid much laughter an impromptu lunch was quickly laid upon one of the flattest boulders, and the party seated themselves, as best they could, around it.

"I'm glad we've got it all to ourselves," said Amethyst, with a deep sigh of enjoyment, as she passed a plate containing half a pork-pie to Marcus; between whom and herself a truce had been declared.

"I can't understand it," added the vicar. "I should have thought half Sandyshore would come to such a charming spot." And he leaned over and looked

down at the dark blue sea, dashing up against the base of the rocks, some sixty or seventy feet below.

"It is rather an expensive drive, for one thing," said his wife, who was engaged in pouring lemonade syrup into glasses, to which Elsa added water.

"By the way, where is our coachee?" enquired Marcus. "Isn't he to have something to eat?"

"He has driven on to the Coastguard station, to put up his horse," replied his father. "Some relations of his live there, he says. He will turn up again at four."

"Are you enjoying your holiday, Miss Beauchamp?"

Monica started at the sound of a voice near her elbow, and looked up to see that the young clergyman, of whom she was frightfully shy, and whom she had done her utmost to avoid so far, had found a seat near her own, which was rather a high lump of rock where she had perched herself in order to get a good view of the undercliff.

"Yes, thank you, very much," she faltered; and then she pulled herself together, for it was an unusual thing for Monica Beauchamp to be at a loss for words.

"Sandyshore, and indeed all the coast in this neighbourhood, is very lovely," said Leslie Herschel, his eyes sweeping the panorama that stretched out before them.

"I couldn't bear staying here last year," admitted Monica, "and when I knew my grandmother was coming again, I was vexed at first; but I should have been very sorry not to have come, now."

"How is that? May I ask what has made the difference?" And there was eager questioning in his voice, also in the dark eyes which met Monica's.

"Why, I have had my special friend, Olive Franklyn, with me, this year, and that has made all the difference," was Monica's reply.

Leslie heaved an involuntary sigh, for he had observed the young girl's startled attention on the previous Sunday morning, and he had hoped to have heard that it was the presence of a new-found Heavenly Friend that had made things different. He looked earnestly at Monica, who was occupied with balancing her plate, safely, upon one knee, and wondered whether the present was a good opportunity for speaking a word for his Master, or whether a better one might occur later on.

He had just decided that there is no better time than "now," when Monica looked up with a merry word about the difficulty she was experiencing with her plate, and in a moment more the article in question had slipped out of her grasp, and was lying in fragments on the ground, some six or seven feet below.

All hope of a further *tête-à-tête* was prevented by the contretemps; and when peace reigned again, Monica was to be found seated amongst the others, in case,

next time, she should let herself fall, instead of her plate!

"What were you talking about up there, Monica?" whispered Olive, who had been extremely curious to know what the young clergyman had been saying.

"You!" was the very unexpected reply; and that was all the information she could get, whereat she was all the more puzzled. She had noticed Mr. Herschel glance at her, while Monica was speaking; surely she had never told him of their conversation after the sermon! If so, perhaps he would be trying to get a talk with her; and Olive was filled with alarm at the idea, for her conscience had been accusing her very loudly. However, she determined not to give him an opportunity of speaking to her alone, by never leaving Monica for an instant, and, by that means, she congratulated herself she prevented any more conversation between him and her friend.

But Olive need not have been quite so scheming, for after the whole party had explored the caves, Mr. Drury and the two young men went off on a tour of inspection, leaving Mrs. Drury and the girls to amuse themselves close home.

Mrs. Drury's suggestion that they should all sit still for a little while and enjoy the beautiful view and delicious breeze after the darkness and dampness of the caves, was received with acclamation, Amethyst stipulating that she should tell them a story.

Her mother, who was accustomed to a request of that nature, demurred at first, but finally consented, and they were delighted with her racy account of a journey she had taken in her girlhood's days, when a terrific snowstorm had kept all the passengers imprisoned in the train, several miles from a station, for more than twenty-four hours.

Monica followed next, with some particulars of her early days in Burmah, culled rather from what she had been told than from what she actually remembered. And then Olive protested that she was tired of sitting still, and proposed a search for some way of reaching a piece of sand which could be seen at a little distance along the coast.

Amethyst and Monica were ready enough to go with her, but Elsa, who was no climber, decided to keep Mrs. Drury company; so the trio set off on their voyage of discovery.

"Do be careful, girls," pleaded Mrs. Drury, who was rather anxious, well knowing their zeal was apt to run away with their discretion; "and unless you succeed in finding either some steps, or a proper path leading down to the shore, you are on no account to go. I can trust you, Amethyst?"

"Oh, yes, mumsie! We'll promise to be awfully careful," the shrill treble voice called back, and a few minutes later the sight of a handkerchief waving in the breeze proclaimed the fact that a beaten track had been found; and the two who were left behind settled down to a cosy half-hour.

Elsa, who loved Mrs. Drury only next to her own mother, squeezed up close to her, and the vicar's wife put a protecting arm round the girlish figure, for she had a very warm corner in her heart for quiet, gentle Elsa. Then they had what was a delightful, helpful chat to the young girl, who confided all her hopes and fears about Monica and Olive to Mrs. Drury, and was encouraged to pray on, and look out for opportunity of service. The latter remark reminded Elsa of the young clergyman's text, and Roger's decision, and, from her own difficulties and anxious thoughts about her twin sister, she went on to speak of the future that now stretched out before her favourite brother.

"I think it is so splendid of him to want to be a missionary," and Elsa's face glowed with animation; "but I am afraid it will disappoint father a good deal, and poor mamma will be *very* sad at the thought of his going so far away, but she will not let him know it, because she will be so glad for him to go, really. I suppose, if all is arranged, that he would not start for a year or two, would he, Mrs. Drury?"

"No, dear, I expect not."

"That will give mamma a nice long time to get used to it," replied Elsa contentedly. She was singularly childish in some things, and correspondingly sensible about others.

Mrs. Drury cast a shrewd glance at the bright young face, which was turned seawards, and sighed. She realised what even the elder Franklyns either could not, or would not, dream of, that the gentle, patient, invalid mother was fading slowly, but surely, away; and she knew that the happenings of even a year hence would have no power to bring either gladness or sorrow to Mrs. Franklyn, who by then would be in the presence of the King. But the twins had no idea of it, and as Mrs. Drury sat silently looking at Elsa, who was all unconscious of the terrible sorrow in store for them all, she wondered if she were wise in leaving the girl in ignorance, for she could imagine what the shock would be like, when the blow fell. She had talked the matter over with Mrs. Franklyn, who well knew upon what a slender thread her life hung, and had urged her to let her children be prepared for the inevitable; but their mother had pleaded their youth, and said it would be time enough later on to break the news to them, and Mrs. Drury had no choice but to be silent, although she did not agree with her friend.

Elsa, who had been indulging in the pleasantest daydreams, roused herself to find her companion beginning to look anxiously in the direction in which the girls had gone, for time was getting on, and they ought to have been returning by then.

"It is half-past three, Elsa," she said, and there was a ring of real concern in her voice; "it is careless of them to have been so long, for we must soon think about preparing for home. Can you see any signs of them? Your eyes are younger than mine."

But Elsa was obliged to confess that she could not, even though she mounted with some trepidation to the top of a huge boulder in order to get a more extended view.

"We would go and look for them," went on the vicar's wife, "only it is hardly safe to leave the bicycles, and all our things. I am vexed with them for staying away so long."

"Shall I run along the cliff and see if I can find them?" suggested Elsa, who was not without anxiety about the missing trio herself. "I could go very quickly, if you would not mind staying here with our belongings."

"Perhaps you would be able to see them, Elsa, and then call to them to return at once. But don't go far, dear," said Mrs. Drury, now really worried about the absentees.

"If you would go on packing up, we will all try to be back by the time you are ready," said Elsa, with a cheeriness she was far from feeling, as she hurried off.

CHAPTER XVII.

"DON'T PERSUADE ME NOT TO, ANY MORE."

Meanwhile, how had the missing trio been spending their time?

With delight, after walking about a quarter of a mile along the cliff, they found some old, uneven steps leading down to its base. They were very unsafe-looking, as several were missing at intervals; but, neither of the three girls being troubled with nerves, they proceeded to descend cautiously. Amethyst was the last to climb down, and it was her white handkerchief, fluttering in the breeze, which Mrs. Drury and Elsa had seen.

"I say, girls, mind how you get down here," cried Monica, who was leader. "It's an awful stretch." And she dropped a distance of several feet, to gain a foothold on a lower step.

"It's a good thing we have a gymnasium at school," said Olive, who had lost a considerable amount of breath over her scrambling; "that kind of practice helps one in experiences of this sort."

"Oh, Olive, I can't possibly get down there, my legs won't reach!" And Amethyst looked hopelessly at the long distance between the step she was on and the next one below.

"Drop down, you'll be all right," said both the girls encouragingly.

"Oh, I couldn't, I should fall!" cried the smaller girl, a spice of fear in the shrill tones.

"Oh, come along! Don't be a coward, Thistle!" said Olive contemptuously. "Here, I'll give you a hand."

Either the hand or the sneer had the desired effect, for Amethyst was a plucky little girl really; and in another moment she was landed safely on the lower step.

That proved to be the worst difficulty, and eventually, the shore was reached without further trouble.

"I wish Jack was here; he would like a race along this sand, poor old chap," said Monica, whose one sorrow had been the leaving of her devoted dog behind.

"Yes, isn't it jolly down here, and not a soul to be seen," cried Olive. "I wonder if there are any shells about?"

A search was instituted, and a collection of various kinds quickly gathered together, and tied up in a handkerchief. Then paddling was proposed, and a merry time ensued of splashing about, off and on the large flat rocks with which the sand was thickly studded at that particular spot.

"What's the time, Monica?" Amethyst enquired at length.

"Why, past three already," was the horrified reply; "how quickly the time has flown! We must give this up, girls, and get our shoes and stockings on."

The drying process was accomplished as satisfactorily as was compatible with only two very minute handkerchiefs, and seizing the bundle of shells, the girls reluctantly bade farewell to the charming and secluded little cove.

"I vote we find some other way up the cliff," suggested Monica; and the idea was received with acclamation by Olive, on account of variety, also by Amethyst, who thought any other means would be preferable to the last.

"There's no other way nearer the caves," said Olive, as her glance swept the dangerous-looking rocky cliffs, which seemed to be almost perpendicular. "But perhaps if we go a little further on we shall find some better steps."

They walked along the sands some little distance, eagerly scanning the cliffs, but alas! no other steps were to be seen anywhere. However, the cliff seemed to be more sloping, and not quite so forbidding-looking, and Olive declared that she could see what looked like a pathway, running zig-zag upwards.

"Let's try it," she said, and leading the way, she began scrambling up the rocky cliff.

Monica followed suit, and Amethyst, determined not to be thought cowardly again, tried her very hardest to keep up with them. But, partly on account of her being smaller and a little more nervous than the others, and also because they had thoughtlessly rather than intentionally left her to carry the bundle of shells, she made very slow progress.

Thus it came to pass that she had got a very little way up the steep incline, when a cry of fear, and a quantity of loose sand, and small rocky stones, falling about her, made her look up in alarm. Monica and Olive had managed, by hook or by crook, to get within fifteen or twenty feet of the top of the cliff, but a false footing had caused Olive to slip; a projection which she had imagined to be firm hard rock, and to which she had trusted her whole weight, having crumbled away beneath her, and she had gone slipping down with it!

"Oh!" Amethyst's eyes grew round with terror, and she felt rooted to the spot; suppose Olive should go on falling all the way down. How dreadful it would be, and no one near to help do anything!

Monica, separated from her friend by several feet of crumbling cliff, tried her hardest not to lose her nerve, but an irresistible feeling came over her that, if once she looked back, she must fall, too.

"Are you hurt, Ollie?" she called out, while she clung to a tuft of grass which happened to be near, and tried to steady herself. But no answer came, and fearing she knew not what she looked down the cliff.

"Oh! Ollie, have you hurt yourself?" she cried again, in an agony of fear, for Olive looked so white and strange, half-standing, half-lying on a sloping bit of rock.

"I--don't--know." The answer came back, slowly, this time, in tones so unnatural that Monica shuddered and grew cold. What had happened to Olive that she should speak and look like that? Supposing she should faint, then all chance of getting her either up or down would be at an end. Monica did not know that her friend was simply paralysed with fear, and for the time being could neither speak nor move.

"Try to hold on, Ollie dear, and I'll come down to you," said the elder girl bravely, although she well knew that it was certain danger to attempt to descend that shifting, crumbling portion of cliff. "Amethyst," she called out to the shivering child below, "try to get down, and run as hard as ever you can to the bottom of the cliff, where the others are, and shout to them to come."

Slipping and sliding, Amethyst reached terra firma once more, and set off running as fast as her trembling legs would carry her; and Monica began her perilous task.

"O God," she whispered, aloud, in her dire extremity, "do help me now! Do keep Olive safely, and let me reach her, and oh, please send some one to help us quickly!"

She did not know what made her pray, but some unseen power impelled her to utter those few short words in her agony of helplessness and fear; and even as the words died on her lips she felt a peculiar sensation of calm stealing over her, and her hands and feet seemed to be guided to just the places which would hold.

A few moments, and she had reached Olive's side, and steadying herself upon a small, but firm piece of rock, she put her arm tenderly round her companion's waist, and begged her to tell her if anything serious was the matter.

"Oh, Monica!" Olive murmured, with a convulsive shudder which nearly caused them both to lose their foothold, "I am so frightened! I looked down as I fell, and it seemed as if I *must* go rolling all the way down to the bottom, and if I had.... Oh, Monica, I should have been killed, I know I should!" And Olive burst into tears.

"Don't cry, dear," said Monica, soothingly; "if we can manage to hold on until help comes, we shall be all right. I--have asked--God to let us both be saved, Ollie," she added, in a lower tone, "and--I believe He will."

"Oh, Monica," wailed Olive, as she clung to her friend, "I tried so hard to pray when I felt myself falling, but I *couldn't*! And then I remembered all I said last Sunday morning, and it seemed as if God was punishing me for my wickedness, by giving me no more chance."

"I don't think He is like that," said Monica. "I think He loves us too much. I am sure I have heard something about Him not wanting anybody to perish. I am going to try to serve Him after this, Olive, so don't persuade me not to, any more."

"Oh, I won't! I am so miserable. I would rather be good, too, but I can't!" cried the unhappy girl, who had caught a glimpse of her real self during those moments of agonised suspense.

"I will try to help you, dear, but I shan't know quite what to do myself," said Monica; "but if God hears our prayers, and lets us get rescued, it would be mean not to try to please Him after that."

"He may hear your prayers," was Olive's desponding reply, "but I *can't* pray."

"Try, dear," whispered Monica, closing her own eyes, and asking once again that help might be speedily forthcoming, for she did not feel as if she could hold on much longer. But, even as she prayed, a voice calling both their names came floating over the cliff, and Elsa's face, white and strained, but with hope written all over it, looked down at them.

"Hold tight, Monica and Olive, just for a minute more. Mr. Herschel is coming down to help you."

And in a moment more, the young clergyman, his body encircled by a stout rope, which was secured at the other end to the stump of a tree on the cliff path above, climbed carefully but quickly down to them.

"Thank God, we were near at hand!" he said, as he realised the spent condition both girls were in; "but you will soon be safe now."

"Please take Olive first," urged Monica, and Leslie, filled with admiration for the pluck and unselfishness the girl displayed, made his way cautiously to the summit, half-leading, half-carrying the almost helpless Olive, the rope which was

slowly pulled up as he neared the top, affording him a sense of security.

It was the work of a very few moments to lay his burden down upon the short heather, to be tenderly cared for by Elsa, and to return for her companion. Marcus eagerly suggested that he should take a turn, but Leslie waved him back, saying: "No, no, Drury; you do the holding, that's the hardest, really," and was scrambling down again before he could be gainsaid.

"Your friend is safe," he said, as he reached Monica's side, and at his words a tinge of colour appeared in her face, which was white even to the lips, but quite calm. "You're not afraid to trust yourself to me?" he added, more as an assertion than a question, for he had observed, with satisfaction, that Monica had heaved a little sigh of content as she felt herself supported by his strong arm.

"No, oh! no," she whispered, and a smile, pathetic in its wanness, illumined the girlish features, causing the young clergyman's heart to beat strangely, in a fashion hitherto unknown to him. Then she nerved herself for the necessary climb, which was accomplished in silence, and neither of the couple was sorry when the brow of the cliff was eventually reached in safety, and Marcus cried: "Bravo!"

"I can never, never thank you enough, Mr. Herschel," Monica murmured, as Leslie gently pushed her to a heather-covered mound, and, bidding her rest a bit, threw himself on the grass beside her.

"Please say no more," he entreated earnestly, "it was a mere nothing; I have always been a climber. But I am afraid this afternoon's mishap will cause you to have unpleasant recollections of Gullane Head."

A happy little smile played about Monica's lips. "No, indeed, I shall always be glad----" she began, earnestly; but before she could finish her sentence, Elsa, whose whole attention had been taken up by Olive, came to express her delight at the happy ending to what had seemed an almost unavoidable accident.

"How is Olive? I must go to her," said Monica, rising, vexed with herself for having forgotten her friend, even for a moment.

"She is feeling more herself now," replied Elsa, "but I don't believe she can walk a step, her legs tremble so, she says. And I don't know how we shall get back to Mrs. Drury," and Elsa looked troubled.

"We'll manage that," said Marcus, cheerfully. "Come on, Herschel, let's make a bandy chair, as the youngsters call it, and carry her between us."

Olive demurred feebly, but it was very palpable when she tried to stand that she was far too exhausted to walk, so without more ado the two young men bore her off, Monica and Elsa bringing up the rear.

The former was glad to slip her arm in Elsa's, for she felt surprisingly shaky, and as they walked along the heather-grown cliff path, Monica learned how it was that Elsa had procured help; a question she had been longing to ask.

It was soon explained--Elsa, going in search of the belated trio, had met

Marcus and his friend leisurely strolling along the cliff, but not near enough to the edge to see what was happening. Fearing she knew not what, but instinctively feeling that they were in danger of some kind, Elsa told her fears to the young fellows, who at once proceeded to help in the search.

With long strides they made for the cliff-side, in order to scan the shore, and were horrified to see the perilous position the two girls were in, less than twenty-five feet below them. A fisherman's little shanty, presumably used in connection with lobster catching, close at hand, was hastily ransacked, and a stout coil of rope produced with intense satisfaction; and while young Herschel fastened on the rope, Elsa had encouraged the girls with words of hope.

"What *will* Mrs. Drury be thinking?" queried Monica, as they neared the Gullane Caves, following closely in the wake of the young men, who were still carrying their burden. "Oh, dear, what a lot of anxiety I do give people!"

"I don't think you must blame yourself specially, Monica dear," said Elsa gently; "you all seem to have agreed to attempt the climb together."

"It didn't really look difficult; not anything like so bad as the steps would have been to get up; and we should have reached the top all right if Olive hadn't slipped and lost all her nerve. Oh, there are Mr. and Mrs. Drury. They are looking *so* worried," added Monica; "and Amethyst has actually got up to them. How *did* she do it?"

It was some little time before everybody knew just what had happened to everybody else; but eventually all was explained, and expressions of thankfulness were heard that the results were no worse than they were.

"I was getting dreadfully frightened about you all," said Mrs. Drury, whose face still bore traces of the anxiety she had passed through, "especially when Elsa had been gone some time. I was thankful to find Mr. Drury close at hand; but I had no sooner told him what had been happening during his absence, than we heard shouts, and descried Amethyst down on the sands below, trying to tell us something, but what it was we could not hear, on account of the wind. However, in a very few moments Mr. Drury had gone down the steps and helped her up, and just as she had made us realise the danger you girls were in, we were immensely relieved to see the cavalcade approaching. It has been a merciful escape." And Mrs. Drury shuddered as she thought of what the result of their foolhardiness might have been, but for God's providential care.

"Now, what shall we do for this girlie?" she enquired tenderly, as she endeavoured to improve Olive's dishevelled appearance, without much success, for both she and Monica were covered with sand, which no amount of rubbing would remove from their clothes. "Shall we drive to the coastguard station and get some tea; or will you have some lemonade and cake that was left from lunch, and get off home as quickly as we can? The waggonette is here."

All were unanimously of opinion that the second proposal was most to their taste, and in a very short time the party set off homewards, the horse, well knowing he had his head turned towards his stable, going at a brisk trot.

Olive, whom they made as comfortable as they could with cloaks and a large rug, seemed powerless to talk or exert herself in any way; indeed, her lethargic attitude somewhat alarmed Mrs. Drury, who felt she would be glad when Sandyshore was reached. But the motion of driving seemed to have a soporific effect upon the exhausted girl, and with her head on Elsa's shoulder she fell asleep, and did not awaken until the waggonette pulled up at Rocklands.

"Are you very angry with me, Mrs. Drury?" Monica asked penitently, during the homeward drive, for that lady had been very silent, and Monica could not but feel that she was displeased with their rashness, as indeed she was.

"Not more with you than the others, my dear," was the somewhat grave reply.

"If you will forgive me this time, Mrs. Drury, I hope I shall not go on being quite so troublesome to every one after this." Monica spoke with a quiet decision and earnestness unusual to her.

Mrs. Drury, who, of course, knew nothing of the new and unwonted thoughts passing through the mind of the girl beside her, was touched by her remark, but thought it would be a good place to say a word of caution.

"I daresay you do feel, now, as if you would not willingly cause trouble and anxiety to your friends by your thoughtlessness, just as present. But it is not enough to *mean* well, Monica; we always fail to keep our resolutions if we make them in our own strength."

Her eyes sought those of the girl who sat beside her, and something that she read in them told her what had happened, even before Monica diffidently whispered the good news.

The vicar's wife bent and kissed the earnest face, with glad tears in her eyes, as she murmured: "May God bless and keep you always, my child."

Amethyst, turning round from her seat on the box, where she had been amusing the old coachman with her chatter, was amazed at what she saw, and looked curiously at Monica. But her mother, merely saying quietly: "Monica has some news to tell you another time," turned the conversation into a fresh channel.

Elsa, who had caught a word or two now and then, as she sat silently supporting her sleeping sister, flashed a radiant look at Monica, which was acknowledged by a loving little smile; and the young girl's heart was almost overwhelmed

with joy at this fresh answer to prayer.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"I EXPECT IT WILL BE RATHER SLOW AND--POKEY!"

Olive, whose nervous system had received a severe shock, did not regain her usual strength for some days, and in accordance with the doctor's advice (for Mrs. Beauchamp had hastily sent for a medical man) was compelled to take things very quietly during the remainder of their stay at Sandyshore.

It was quite a new experience for the high-spirited, romping girl to be cut off from the pursuits that they had all been accustomed to, and a not altogether pleasant one. But at first she felt totally unable to join Monica and Elsa at their bathing or tennis, and was only too glad to lie in a deck chair on the sands, and watch the others engaged in active exercise which she seemed to have lost the courage to enter into.

It was a very quiet Olive who was Mrs. Beauchamp's companion during those days, and but for the doctor's assurance that she would soon recover her usual robust health, both the old lady and Mrs. Drury would have been very anxious about her. As it was, they all strove to cheer and amuse her, as much as possible, and Monica and Elsa were untiring in their devotion. They never alluded to the episode on Gullane Cliffs in her hearing, as any reference to it seemed to revive the old, nervous fear which had seized her at the time; but they often found her looking with a sort of fascinated, and yet awestruck intentness, at the white cliffs in the distance, which closely resembled those beyond the lighthouse.

One day Olive broke through the reserve herself. Monica, who had been bathing, was sitting beside her, her hair hanging dank and loose about her shoulders, in order that the sun might dry it.

"Monica," she said, "you none of you ever say a word about *that day*, but I am always thinking of it.

"Then I should begin to forget it at once," was the brusque reply. "It is all over and done with, and there is no need for *you* to remember 'that day,' as you call it, any more. As for me, I do not wish ever to forget it." And a happy smile overspread Monica's sunburnt face.

"Oh, I know," interposed Olive hastily, who was afraid her friend would open up the subject which she dreaded. "But even when I sleep, I always seem to feel

myself slipping down, down, down; and I only stop when I wake. Oh, it is an awful feeling!" And the girl shuddered convulsively.

"I am sure you could forget it if you made an effort to," was Monica's apparently unfeeling reply. But she had overheard the doctor saying something similar, and, to her strong-minded nature, Olive's fancy seemed ridiculous. "You will never be well until you do."

Whether Monica's sensible advice had any effect upon Olive, or whether she really was on the mend already, it would be difficult to say, but, at any rate, it was noticeable that from about that time the improvement in her was very marked indeed, and by the time their return to Osmington drew near, she had become practically herself again. Mrs. Beauchamp was extremely glad, as she would have been very sorry for either of her charges to have gone home the worse, rather than the better, for the holiday.

"Oh, dear!" sighed Amethyst dolefully, as the quartette ensconced themselves for the last time in one of their favourite nooks, on a grassy slope overlooking the bay--"oh, dear! I *am* sorry to be going home."

"So am I!" echoed the others, and Elsa added, "Except that it will be just lovely to see mamma again."

"If it weren't for all of them at home," put in Olive, "I should like to stay until school begins."

"We should find it rather dull," said Monica; "there would be no one left but us, for the Drurys would be gone. I miss the Herschels already, although they only went yesterday."

"You got so awfully friendly with them after the picnic," retorted Olive.

"We all liked them," interposed Elsa, for she saw a little flush upon Monica's cheek. "I think Miss Herschel was a dear; but, of course, she would naturally be most friendly with Monica, because she is the eldest of us!"

A grateful little squeeze told Elsa that Monica was pleased with her for championing her cause, as she said softly, with far-seeing eyes, "I shall always be thankful that I have known the Herschels, even if I never see them again. They have helped me a great deal."

Olive, fearful lest the conversation should drift in a direction she would fain shun, interrupted the silence that had fallen upon them, by saying hurriedly, and with apparent enthusiasm: "I say, girls, what about that missionary meeting we are invited to? When is it?"

"To-morrow afternoon."

"Shall we go? I expect it will be rather slow and--pokey."

"Why should it?" queried Monica, who was continually finding herself differing from her friend, now-a-days.

"Oh, I don't know why, I'm sure; but missionary meetings are always dull

affairs. They read long reports, you know, and tell silly little tales about goody-goody children, who would a hundred times rather put the one, and only, penny they possess in a missionary box, than spend it on themselves." And the girl laughed satirically.

"Oh, Olive!" expostulated Elsa, while Amethyst opened her eyes to their widest proportions.

"Well, *I* am going, anyhow," said Monica decisively, for whom, since she had been influenced by Leslie Herschel, every thing of a missionary nature had great attractions. "It will be my first experience of a missionary meeting, so I am going to find out what it's like."

"So am I," echoed Elsa and Amethyst, and Olive was obliged to fall in with the general opinion, as she did not care about being left out.

The meeting, to which the quartette, as well as many other girls among the visitors, had been invited a few days previously, had been kindly arranged by a lady living in Sandyshore, and was to be held on her beautiful lawn the next afternoon. Only girls, of all ages, had received invitations, and no grown-up people were expected to be present.

When the appointed time came, the hostess, a dear old lady of seventy or more, whose heart, home, and purse were devoted to the cause of spreading the gospel news, welcomed her young guests as they arrived, and three, at any rate, of our party felt their hearts go out to her as her kindly smile and gentle words greeted them. Olive, who felt belligerent, prided herself on not being so easily won.

They found quite a number of girls, most of whom they knew well by sight, from continual meetings on the sands or tennis-courts, already seated on the chairs which had been carefully placed in a shady portion of the lawn, and slipping into some empty places, they waited for further developments.

Two ladies, standing under a pretty rose-covered verandah, were engaged in conversation near a little table strewn with various books and pamphlets; another had just taken her seat before a small harmonium, while yet a fourth was handing round hymn-sheets.

"Which do you suppose is the speaker?" whispered Monica to Elsa, who was next to her, "the lady in the nurse's uniform, or the one in black?"

"I can't tell, they both look so nice. The tall, dark one in mourning looks clever; but I almost hope it will be the other, she looks so sweetly pretty." And both girls looked admiringly at the fair, healthy, girlish face framed in its dark blue bonnet.

Soon a hymn was given out, in which the twenty-five or thirty girls joined somewhat shyly at first; this sort of meeting was an unusual experience for the majority of them. But the easily caught-up tune, sung so heartily by the lady

helpers, inspired them, and by the time the last verse was reached quite a volume of sound rose from the youthful audience.

After a short, informal prayer, by the elder of the two ladies, which was a revelation to Monica, who had never heard a woman's voice uplifted in extempore prayer before, the girls sang another hymn; and then, after a few explanatory words from the same lady, who they discovered was a daughter of their hostess, the nurse stepped forward, and began to speak in clear, ringing tones, which could be heard all over the lawn, and which secured the attention of all.

"I was so very pleased," she began, "when Mrs. Murray asked me if I would have a little 'talk' with some girl-friends of hers one afternoon while I was staying with her for a few days in this delightful place. And I will tell you why. First, because I love English girls; second, because I love Chinese girls; and third, because I long to get the former to become interested in their sisters with a pig-tail, in that far-off land, behind the Great Wall.

"So now, while we are all here together, I want you to listen while I tell you something of my work for the last five years in China, and then I will try to show you what you can do, *if you will*, to help make the lives of Chinese girls brighter and happier. First and foremost, I must start by saying that girls are thought little or nothing of in China; they are *not wanted*. And, although it is not really allowed, in one way or another nearly one-half of all the baby girls who are born in China are either drowned, or murdered, or what is even worse, buried alive directly they are born! And when I tell you that out of every three people in the whole world one is born in China, you can guess something of how many there are. It made my heart ache, often and often, to be in the midst of such dreadful cruelty; and yet we must not altogether blame the Chinese, for they do not know that our Heavenly Father values girls just as much as He does boys, and is grieved when they are ill-treated.

"But though it is sad to think of the little babies dying, they are really better off than many of the little girls who are left to grow up. For there is a cruel custom in China of squeezing the feet of little girls up tight, by means of a bandage--so"--and Hope Daverel picked up a strip of calico, and deftly bound up her left hand to illustrate her words--"until it hurts most dreadfully. Of course, the little girl cries with the pain, but no one pities her, and in a few days it is unbound, and done up tighter still. Sometimes a mother will take a big stick to bed with her, in order to beat the child if she screams with the awful pain. I wonder how *you* would like that?"

The young missionary paused a moment, and looked down enquiringly into the young faces before her, which expressed horror at the recital of China's woes.

"Well, the poor feet have to go on being squeezed smaller and smaller, until after about two years they are considered small enough to be pretty! Oh! girls,

you who love pretty things, think of it an ugly lump, without any shape, tiny enough to totter about in shoes like this," and Miss Daverel held up a wee Chinese shoe. "This is a full-sized shoe for a lady, and it only measures two inches and a half! This pair has been actually worn by a woman belonging to one of my classes, and she gave them to me on purpose to bring home and show to you. A girl's chances of getting married depend entirely upon the smallness of her feet: they do not trouble at all about whether she is clever, or handsome or good. And she is married, often, as young as six months old! and is taken away from her own mother, to go and live with the mother of the little boy, or lad, who is her husband. It is difficult for you English girls to imagine such a state of affairs; but unless you know *something* about them, you cannot do much towards helping your Chinese sisters. Once they are married, the poor girls have a very, very dull life, if they are fortunate enough to escape ill-treatment from their husbands. One of the first questions asked by the Chinese ladies whom I go to visit, in their dim, cheerless rooms at the back of the house, is 'Does your husband beat you?' and when I shake my head and say I am not married, they look astounded, and say: '*So* old, and no husband!'

"But sad as their lives are, their fear of what comes after death is far more sad. The women are taught that there is no heaven for them, and all that the very best of them can look forward to is that, after numbers of future lives spent in torment, they *may* be born again into this world as a little boy! And they are so afraid of evil spirits, who they think are constantly on the look-out to do them untold harm: they even call the boys by girls' names, so that they may not be thought *worth* harming! and when the poor creatures die, as the funeral procession goes along the road, imitation money made in paper like this" (and the speaker held up samples) "is scattered about, to propitiate any evil spirits that may be near; while clothes, money, and various other things, all made in paper, are burned at the grave side, in order that the dead person may have them to use in the other world. And that sort of thing is continually being done before what they call ancestral tablets, or at the graves of relations who have died, lest the spirits of the departed should come back to earth and trouble those that are living. Millions of pounds are spent every year, in that way alone.

"Is it not all terribly sad? I am sure that you agree with me that it is, and are wishing that you knew of some way to help. Well, I will tell you; there are many things you might do. I suppose that most of you elder girls go to school; when you meet your school-friends again, you can pass on to them what I have told you this afternoon; and perhaps you could gather some of them together to dress dolls, or make little presents such as we missionaries love to be able to give to the children and girls who attend our schools, or come to us for medicine. A little gift from England is *such* a treasure; it would repay you for any self-denial it

may cost, if you could only see the delight on the poor, little, dull faces, when they catch sight of the doll, or the pair of bright knitted cuffs, or the little cotton-box, that the *guniong*, as they call us, is going to give them. And besides that, you can give some of your pocket-money: those pence and shillings which it is *so* easy to fritter away on mere nothings, and things which do not last. Oh! girls, which do you think you will value *most* in the great day of reckoning which is coming, the sweets you have eaten, the grand collection of picture post-cards you were so eager to get, or the Master's 'Well done!' which will surely be spoken to those who have denied themselves for His sake?

"But working and giving are not everything--there is praying. And if, as I do hope, there are some here who have found a precious Friend in Jesus for themselves, will you not pray that your Chinese sisters may find Him too? There are millions of them who have never heard His name, even *once*, yet; and they are dying *so* fast, without God, and without hope. So I am praying that He will touch some of the girls' hearts here this afternoon, and fill them with an intense longing to go and bear His message, in the years to come, to the women and girls in far-off China.

"Now shall we sing a hymn, so simple that even the smallest can understand it, and will you try to mean every word?" And soon, girlish voices were singing, with real earnestness,

The fields are all white,
And the reapers are few;
We children are willing,
But what can we do
To work for our Lord in His harvest?

Our hands are so small,
And our words are so weak,
We cannot teach others;
How then shall we seek
To work for our Lord in His harvest?

We'll work by our prayers,
By the gifts we can bring,
By small self-denials;
The least little thing
May work for our Lord in His harvest.

Until, by-and-by,

As the years pass, at length
We, too, may be reapers,
And go forth in strength
To work for our Lord in His harvest.

Just a few solemn words of prayer followed, in which Miss Daverel asked that her young hearers might realise the need of the heathen, and with God's help seek to do their part towards satisfying it; and then the meeting ended.

While tea was being handed round by Mrs. Murray's maids, Miss Daverel, who had noted Monica's rapt attention, drew her aside, and after a few whispered words, she and a little maiden of not much over six accompanied the missionary indoors, to reappear in a few minutes in Chinese costume.

"Oh!" cried the girls, as first one and then another discovered what appeared to be a Chinese lady and her little girl coming across the lawn towards them, and they all crowded round, while Hope Daverel showed them the beautifully embroidered red satin coat and kilted skirt, such as the wife of a mandarin or high official would wear, and which Monica's tall figure showed off to advantage. They all laughed merrily at the quaint little object in mauve and yellow jacket and *trousers*, who, they were told, looked just like a little Chinese girl, with the exception of her hair and feet.

Tea over, all the girls were given magazines or little booklets about missionary work, and Miss Daverel showed them samples of all sorts of nice easy things that are valued so much as gifts, not only in China, but in all parts of the mission field; and she gladly promised to send all particulars (and a missionary box!) to any or every girl who would write to her, and tell her that she had found some others to help her, and they wanted to start working.

"I say, girls, we'll make some things, won't we, when we get back?" said Monica, as the quartette wended their way homewards.

"Oh, yes!" cried Amethyst and Elsa, simultaneously; and if Olive said nothing, her voice was not missed. "And we'll get a lot of the High School girls to join us."

"I wish Miss Daverel lived at Osmington," said Elsa wistfully; "she would show us just what to do."

"Oh, she is wanted in China," was Monica's decisive reply; "she can't possibly be spared from there. I daresay we shall be able to make the things by her directions, and we'll send them to her to give away."

"Mother will help, I'm sure," said Amethyst.

"And Lois, too," added Elsa; "she cuts out splendidly, and makes the stuff go ever so far, because she fits everything in so well."

"It is evident we must begin to save up our pocket-money," said Monica, "because there will be a lot of things to buy, and we want to give it all ourselves, don't we, girls?"

And again, in the eager assent that Monica's words called forth, if one voice was silent, it passed unnoticed.

CHAPTER XIX.

"YOU TELL THEM, LOIS; I COULDN'T."

"There is not likely to be any letter for us, this morning, as we are going home to-morrow," said Elsa, the next morning, as the girls stood in the bay window, watching the postman delivering his missives at practically every house in the steep road which led up to Rocklands. They usually filled up the few minutes before breakfast, while waiting for Mrs. Beauchamp's appearance, in this way.

"I hardly expect there will be one for any of us," said Monica, "unless there should be one from dad forwarded on."

"He's coming in our gate," said Olive; and a few seconds later a maid entered, with one solitary letter on a salver.

"For Mrs. Beauchamp, miss."

"Very well, Ada;" and the girl withdrew, as Mrs. Beauchamp entered.

"Only one letter for you, grannie." Somehow, Monica had slipped into the way of calling her grandmother thus, lately, and the shortened form was by no means unpleasant to Mrs. Beauchamp.

"Just cut it open for me, Elsa, my dear," said the old lady to her "little right hand," as she called her; "while I pour out the coffee."

And Elsa, preparing to do as she was asked, picked up the letter. But as she did so, she observed the writing, and with wonder in her tones, she exclaimed: "I think it must be from Lois!" and she cut it open hastily, a nameless fear taking possession of her.

"Thank you, my dear, I will see what it says," said Mrs. Beauchamp, as she adjusted her pince-nez; "possibly it is some arrangement about your return home." She spoke quietly, but she felt otherwise, for she, too, had a presentiment of impending trouble. With eyes which seemed ready to devour her, Elsa watched Mrs. Beauchamp's face, while she hastily scanned the short letter, and something in its expression made her heart beat with great thumps.

"Mamma!" she faltered, with trembling lips, and even Olive and Monica held their breath while they waited for Mrs. Beauchamp's answer.

"Don't be frightened, dear," she said kindly; "it certainly is about your mother, who is not quite so well. But your father thinks there is nothing to be alarmed at, and hopes she will be as well as usual by the time you reach home to-morrow."

"Are you sure that is quite all?" Elsa whispered, in a voice hoarse with emotion; she loved her mother so intensely that she could not bear the thought of her being worse than her usual invalid condition.

"Quite, my dear; you may read it, both of you," and the twins found nothing different in the few sentences the letter contained.

"I wish we were going home to-day," murmured Elsa wistfully, while tears trembled on her long, dark lashes.

"Nonsense, Elsa!" said Olive, a touch of impatience in her voice; really a sign that she was troubled, too. "I don't suppose that mamma is very much worse than usual, only Lois croaks so."

But Elsa, although she said no more, did not feel comforted; and Mrs. Beauchamp and Monica stole furtive glances at the sad, downcast face of the gentle, loving girl, who had endeared herself to both of them.

Breakfast was a quiet meal, and all were glad when it was ended, although the bright sunshine seemed suddenly clouded over, and the girls' interest in the various amusements they had planned for their last day at Sandyshore had vanished.

They were in their bedrooms, getting ready for a morning on the sands, when a double knock was heard upon the open front door, and poor Elsa grew white as death.

"Oh, Olive, perhaps it's a telegram!" she gasped.

"What a grizzler you are, Elsa!" said Olive, not really unkindly, for she was very fond of her mother, too, though in a totally different fashion from Elsa; "probably it's only the butcher or greengrocer."

But Barnes, with alarm on her face, came to summon the twins, and Elsa knew that her foreboding was true, even before she saw the fateful pink paper in Mrs. Beauchamp's trembling fingers.

"Oh, don't say she's--dead!" wailed Elsa, as she crossed the room; and Olive shuddered convulsively.

"No, no, my dears," said the old lady; "no, no, not that; only very ill, and your father wants you home at once."

"Oh, my dear mamma, my darling mamma!" sobbed Elsa pitifully, as she clung to Mrs. Beauchamp; while Olive, with horror-stricken face and dry eyes, read the few words of the telegram, which ran thus--

"Mother very ill: girls to come home with all possible speed."

"Oh, I wish I'd never left her! I don't believe I'll ever see her again," wailed Elsa, in such heart-broken, pitiful tones, that Monica begged her to try not to cry so, and whispered words of comfort.

"How soon could we go, Mrs. Beauchamp?" Olive said, in a strained, unnatural voice.

"There is a train at eleven," said Monica, who had been studying the time-table, "a very quick one, which arrives at Osmington by one-thirty. The Drurys go home to-day," she added, "but not until the three-fifteen train."

"Oh, Barnes shall go with them," interposed Mrs. Beauchamp, "and return here this evening. We would all go to-day, but the packing could not be done in time for the eleven o'clock train. There is less than an hour, now; so, Monica, you help Olive and Elsa to get their things together, and Barnes shall pack their boxes at once. Cheer up, my dears," she added, to the poor twins, who were already collecting their books and needlework, which were lying about on the different tables; "let us hope for the best; and, very likely, you will find a change for the better has taken place when you reach home."

"Elsa, darling, do let Jesus comfort you," whispered Monica, a few minutes later, when they were alone in the girl's bedroom, "I am asking Him to. And He can make dear Mrs. Franklyn better, you know, if it is His will." Monica spoke shyly; she was unaccustomed to giving Elsa advice--Elsa, who had always appeared almost perfect to hasty, impetuous Monica, who had, by no means, found it easy work to follow in the footsteps of the meek and lowly Saviour.

"Oh, Monica, I have been asking Him to help me bear it!" said Elsa, "and I don't want to grieve Him by fretting. But, oh, you can't think what it would be like to lose my precious mamma!" And the tears rained down the poor child's face.

"No," said Monica, with unconscious pathos, "I can hardly remember how I felt when I lost mine. It is so long ago now, I have nearly forgotten it."

"Monica, will you go on praying, all day, that God will make her better, but if He sees--the other--would be best--for her--that He will help us bear it?"

The words, so hard to utter, came falteringly, and the elder girl, with wet eyes, gathered Elsa into her strong, young arms, and while she pressed a kiss upon the downcast brow, she murmured: "Yes, Elsa, darling, and we know He will."

A hasty scramble to get all packed, a short drive to the station crowded with visitors now making their way homewards at the close of their holiday, and then a few last words were said, after the twins, accompanied by Barnes, had ensconced themselves in one of the fast-filling compartments.

Mrs. Beauchamp, at Elsa's request, had not accompanied them, so only Monica--her sunburnt face, usually so bright, now wearing a sad expression--stood on the platform waiting to bid them farewell.

"The Drurys, Monica," said Olive, as she leant out of the window just as the train began to move, "they won't know. Tell them."

"Yes, I will," replied Monica; "they'll be sure to see you to-night, and I shall come to-morrow. Good-bye, good-bye," and with a would-be cheerful smile she waved to both of them, but her eyes sought Elsa's, who, poor child, was making a brave effort not to give way, and make a scene before a compartment full of people. It was a good thing, in one way, that they had not the luxury of one to themselves.

Very few words were said during the long, long two hours and a half which dragged wearily by. About half-way, Barnes produced a basket of lunch, which she had brought with kindly forethought, and pressed the girls to eat something. Olive managed a couple of sandwiches, but Elsa, who tried to swallow one, felt as if it would choke her, and gave it up after toying with it for a few minutes.

"Have this lovely pear, now do, Miss Elsa," urged Barnes, with whom the kind, thoughtful girl was a great favourite.

And with a pathetic smile, Elsa thanked her, and felt refreshed after eating the juicy fruit.

The twins whispered a sentence or two now and again, but for the most part the journey was accomplished in silence. Elsa lay back with closed eyes as if asleep, except that sometimes her lips moved unconsciously, showing that she was taking her sorrow where alone she would find real comfort.

Olive gazed through the window with unseeing eyes at the country through which they were passing, but her mind was in a turmoil. Could this terrible and unexpected blow be sent by God as a punishment to her for all her wilful neglect of Him? Did He think that by taking her mother away He would *drive* her to become His child? Then nothing should induce her to become one! These and countless other thoughts passed through the unhappy girl's mind, and her heart grew more rebellious than ever. She did not want to become "goody-goody" she told herself, but it was too bad of Monica to have left her in the lurch. And then, she, Olive Franklyn, tried to make a bargain with God! If He would avert the threatened sorrow which overhung her home, and restore her mother to her usual degree of health again, then she would serve Him; but if not----

At length the train began to draw near Osmington, and the girls dreaded and yet longed to see a familiar face on the platform, and to hear the latest bulletin.

They had expected Kathleen, or perhaps only one of the servants, so that they were astonished to see Roger striding up the platform as the train pulled up.

"Oh, Roger!" and the twins each seized a hand and clung to him, "how is she?" whispered Olive, for Elsa was trembling too much to speak; from Roger's sad face she feared the worst.

"She is very, very ill," was all he said gravely; "I am glad you have come, she

[image]

"'OH, ROGER! HOW IS SHE?' WHISPERED OLIVE."

has been asking for you both."

Barnes, who had been standing near, now came forward, and, for the first time, Roger realised that his sisters were not alone. With a word of thanks he spoke gratefully of Mrs. Beauchamp's kindness in sending the girls home under her care, and enquired as to her plans.

"Oh, I return by the next train, sir, thank you, which leaves just after two. I'll just have time to get a cup of tea before I start. Mrs. Beauchamp wished me to offer her sincere sympathy, sir, if I saw any of the family, and she would like to know the latest report."

"Please thank her," said Roger. "My mother has been most grateful for all her kindness to my sisters."

"And how is Mrs. Franklyn now, sir?" she asked.

Roger turned away from the girls, who for the moment were collecting various small packages they had brought with them, and with something suspiciously like a sob in his throat, he replied, "She is sinking rapidly; she cannot live many hours."

"Dear, dear. I *am* sorry to hear that, sir!" said the woman, with real concern. "Poor, dear Miss Elsa."

"Hush! Don't let them hear. I have not said so much to them."

And with a word of farewell to the maid, he bade the twins come with him. Stopping only to give a porter instructions about the luggage, he strode on, and the girls had as much as they could do to keep up with him.

Fortunately, it was only a matter of a very few minutes' walk to their home, so that they were soon there. As they entered the gate, Roger glanced furtively at the windows, for he knew his mother's life was only just trembling in the balance, and even during the fifteen or twenty minutes that he had been absent, the call might have come. But the blinds were up, and he breathed freely. In silence they entered the old side door, and quietly, oh! so quietly, Lois came downstairs to meet them.

What a different home-coming was this from the one they had been anticipating. No bright welcome, no merry words, no gay laughter. Instead of all that, there was an awful hush and unnatural quiet reigning in the busy, bustling household, and it was all owing to the fact that their mother was lying so very, very ill in the well-known room, beyond the baize-covered doors, upstairs.

"I am glad you have come, dears," said Lois, gently, as she bent and kissed the twins, and Elsa saw that her face bore traces of recent tears.

"Oh, Lois!"

"Hush, darlings, hush!" she whispered, as she gently pushed them into the deserted dining-room; "we must not make any noise, it worries her so."

"But she will get better? Oh, Lois, say she will!" cried Olive.

Lois looked enquiringly at Roger; but muttering: "You tell them, Lois; I couldn't," in hoarse tones, he strode by her, and went out, shutting the door gently behind him.

And, with am arm round each of them, Lois told them, in tender words, that God was calling their mother to Himself, and that very, very soon they must give her up. For a few minutes she let them weep on unrestrainedly, knowing well that it was best so. And then, with words of comfort, the elder sister, who in future would have to act a mother's part, bade them think of the peace, and rest, and freedom from all pain that their loved one would soon be enjoying in the presence of her Saviour.

As Lois talked thus, Elsa seemed not to think so much of her own sorrows, as of the gain that would be her mother's, and her sobs grew less as she remembered the blessedness of those who die in Christ Jesus.

But Olive, over whose turbulent young heart a perfect hurricane of doubt was sweeping, refused to be comforted, and wept on unrestrainedly. God was cruel, *cruel* to take their mother away, and nothing Lois or Elsa said would persuade her otherwise.

A hasty opening of the door startled them, and Dr. Franklyn, looking ten years older than when the twins left home, entered the room.

"I hear that Olive and Elsa have come," he said. "Let them get undressed and go to their mother at once. Remember, girls, no scenes," he added severely, and was gone without another word.

After hastily removing their hats, and vainly endeavouring by sponging their faces with cold water to obliterate the traces of emotion, the twins entered their mother's room. If they had expected to see a vast difference in her, they were disappointed for only a very practised eye could tell that Mary Franklyn was nearing the gates of death. To the twins she looked much as usual, the bright flush upon her poor, thin face was so deceptive. She was quite conscious and free from pain, and lay with one hand in her husband's watching for them.

"My girlies," she murmured, and she feebly stroked their sunburnt faces, as they bent over her, and kissed her passionately. "I am so glad--you had--a nice holiday--before--this trouble--came. Don't cry--my darlings--Jesus is--very precious--and He--will bring--all my dear ones--to me--some day." And then she stopped, for her breath was coming in quick, short pantings, and the pulse, upon

which Dr. Franklyn had his finger, was only feebly fluttering.

"Don't exert yourself too much, my dear," he said tenderly, with anguish in his eyes.

A radiant smile passed over the dying woman's worn features, and she lay back, exhausted. "I will--rest--a little," she whispered. For she hoped to recover sufficient strength to speak a last word to these two of her children and Dick, who could not arrive for some hours.

But it was not to be. The gentle sleep into which she presently fell, and which seemed as if it must be doing her good, deepened into that last, long, slumber that knows no awakening in this life, and Mary Franklyn passed into the presence of the King.

The sorrow and sadness in that household during the days that followed can be more easily imagined than described. Lois, Kathleen, and Roger endeavoured to be brave and forgetful of self, as they strove to comfort their father and the younger ones.

Dick, who arrived home a couple of hours after his mother had breathed her last, was inconsolable. He had adored his gentle, fragile mother, and it was heartbreaking to see the erstwhile merry whistler wandering listlessly and silently about the house; or to come upon him, unawares, in some quiet spot whither he had fled in order to indulge his grief unseen. Roger, who had always been his chum in a way that brothers seldom are, now became his comforter; and it was during those sad, sorrowful days, when the younger lad's heart was rendered impressionable by grief, that he began to seek the Saviour whom Roger had lately found, and whom their mother had loved so dearly.

Elsa bore up bravely, after the first terrible outburst, and was very helpful in looking after Joan and Paddy, who fretted for their mother a great deal. But Olive seemed turned to stone. She realised that in the bargain she had sought to make with God she had been worsted! He *might* have spared her mother; He *might* have heard her cry: and she would have kept her promise if He had! But He was cruel, oh! *so* cruel, to snatch her mother away without giving her a chance even to whisper that she was sorry for all the anxiety she had caused her, and that she would be a better girl, in future, if her mother would only say she forgave her. Both Lois and Kathleen sought to break down the stoical reserve, behind which Olive hid her real feelings, but she always repulsed them, and they could only hope that, in time, God would answer their mother's many prayers for her wilful

little daughter.

CHAPTER XX.

"KEEP IT UP, IT ANSWERS VERY WELL."

A few days after Mrs. Franklyn's funeral, Monica Beauchamp, looking very fresh and dainty in a pretty linen frock and straw hat was walking up the shady road leading from the town to The Cedars, Mr. Howell's residence.

She had never yet paid the visit she had promised on the day she sprained her ankle, so Monica had coaxed her grandmother into dropping her in the town, that afternoon, while she drove on to pay a call at a little distance in the country. For some time a plan had been forming in the girl's mind, and a visit to Mrs. Howell was necessary before it could be put into execution.

"I hope Mrs. Howell will be in," she said to herself, as she entered the white gates, and walled up the beautifully kept drive, "and I almost hope that Lily will be *out*," she added; for upon the only occasion she and Lily had met since the unhappy affair at school, the latter had passed Monica with no attempt at recognition, beyond an ugly scowl. At the time (it was before she went to Sandyshore) Monica had felt very much inclined to return the scowl with interest, except that she considered Lily utterly beneath contempt. But lately she had had very different feelings towards her would-be injurer, and it was chiefly on her account that she was so anxious to pay her mother a visit.

Mrs. Howell being at home, Monica was ushered into a huge and magnificently furnished drawing-room, decorated lavishly with plush hangings, of decidedly gay hues, and was warmly welcomed by her hostess, who was delighted to see her.

A quarter of an hour passed pleasantly in chatting over the sprained ankle, long since well, and the holiday she had enjoyed so much, and then Monica broached the subject uppermost in her mind.

"Mrs. Howell," she began diffidently, for she was not quite sure how her proposal would be received, "did Lily tell you *all* about the examination affair?"

"Well, my dear, by degrees we got to know the rights of it, though she would not tell us till her pa threatened to punish her, if she didn't speak out. He was in a great taking when the notice came that she wasn't to go back no more, and he packed her off to stay with his step-sister, a very strict woman, and poor Lily

has had a very rough time of it. She only came back yesterday, and wouldn't have done then, only for her aunt being took ill; for it was her pa's intention to let her bide there some months. Now he talks of sendin' her to boardin'-school, but where to he hasn't no idea. All our plans for her schoolin' was upset-like, you see, my dear, by that notice, and her pa was terrible annoyed to think it all came about through her trying to do you a bad turn. For, to tell the truth, my dear," Mrs. Howell rambled on garrulously, "he thinks a sight of you, does Bob. He would have wrote to apologise, but he couldn't get Lily to say she was sorry, nohow. Oh! dear me, what trouble that girl has caused us, and 'twill be far worse when she comes 'ome from boardin'-school." And the poor woman whimpered distressingly.

"Don't cry, dear Mrs. Howell," said Monica gently; "perhaps she won't have to go away to school at all. Would you like her to go back to the High School if she could? Do you think she would go?"

"Oh, my dear, there's no chance!" was the dismal reply, as Mrs. Howell wiped her florid face with a tiny muslin handkerchief; "they wouldn't take her back now. I only wish they would. I know Lily would be delighted really, although she's said times and times that she'd rather die than ever go there again."

"Well, don't tell her, please, in case it falls through, but grandmother thinks I might write to Miss Buckingham, and perhaps she would overlook it this once and let Lily go back." Monica spoke earnestly, and there was no hint of pride in her tones, neither did she say that it had taken a good deal of persuasion to get Mrs. Beauchamp to consent to let her write on her school-fellow's behalf.

"Oh, Miss Beauchamp, my dear, if you only would!" ejaculated Mrs. Howell, delight and incredulity struggling for the mastery in both tones and countenance. "But it does seem strange that you that's been injured should be the one to do us a good turn. I can't think why you should!" And she looked searchingly into the flushed face opposite her, as if she would find the motive written upon it.

Monica was sorely tempted to make just a mere commonplace reply, but she summoned up all the courage she could, and gave Mrs. Howell the real reason, realising that this was an opportunity afforded her of witnessing to her new Master.

"I don't know whether you know Him, dear Mrs. Howell," she said, a trifle nervously, but with intense earnestness, "but while I was away I accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as my Saviour, and He has forgiven me so much, that I can't help forgiving everybody else. And I think He told me to show Lily how I feel, by trying to do this. Oh, I do hope Miss Buckingham will make it right! I almost think she will."

"Oh, my dear, my dear!" said Mrs. Howell, tremulously, in her eagerness clutching hold of Monica's hands; "you've found some One I've been wanting for

years! My heart's just breaking for want of peace."

And in very simple fashion, for it was all such new and unaccustomed work to her, Monica tried to feed this hungry, longing soul with the Bread of Life. She felt so helpless, but trusting to the Holy Spirit's guidance, she repeated a great deal of the sermon which she would never forget; and Mrs. Howell seemed to literally drink it all in.

"God bless you, my dear," she murmured, as Monica at length rose in haste, having discovered that the time arranged for her to meet the carriage was already past--"God bless and reward you for all you've done. I've been a sinful woman, all my life, but please God this shall be the beginning of better things."

Monica hurried down the hill, a song of thanksgiving in her heart, and a happy smile flickering about her lips. How delightful this new life was! Not for anything would she go back now to the careless, thoughtless days of the past, when she had given others such endless trouble, and been so discontented and miserable herself. She felt as if she loved everybody, that beautiful September day, and as if it would be impossible ever to displease any one again.

But, alas! a rude stare, without a trace of recognition in it, from the object of her solicitude, with whom she came suddenly face to face as she turned a corner, and upon whom she bestowed a radiant smile, and cordial "How do you do, Lily?" sent her on the rest of her way with a small cloud in her hitherto cloudless sky, and a nasty little feeling of wounded pride endeavoured to make itself felt. However, she consoled herself with the thought that Lily would soon have cause to think differently of her, and hastened to the place where she had promised to wait for the carriage.

But, unfortunately, it was just the other way round! The carriage, with Mrs. Beauchamp in it, had been waiting some time for Monica, and her grandmother greeted her with words of displeasure.

"I am very much annoyed, Monica; you are fifteen or twenty minutes behind time," she said severely. "Richards has been driving up and down, up and down, all that time, lest the horses should take cold; they were so very warm. It was very thoughtless indeed of you, to keep me waiting like this."

"I am very sorry, grannie," was all Monica said, as she seated herself beside her grandmother in the landau; and it spoke volumes for her that her voice was gentle, and her look penitent. Monica of old would not have answered thus, and Mrs. Beauchamp knew it, and thoroughly appreciated the change, although she said nothing. Indeed, silence reigned during the drive, and it was not until they were in the drawing-room after dinner that Mrs. Beauchamp enquired the result of Monica's visit.

"You might as well write to Miss Buckingham this evening, if you are still anxious to do so," she said, when she had heard what Mrs. Howell said; "there

is no time to spare, as the letter will have to be forwarded to wherever she is spending her holidays."

And Monica gladly fetched her writing-case, and began to write what proved to be a very difficult epistle. Her pen had to be nibbled thoughtfully many times before the letter was accomplished, and then the result was not all that the writer could wish. She was rather afraid that Mrs. Beauchamp would ask to see it before it went; but, fortunately, just as Monica had signed her name, in school-girl calligraphy, at the end of perhaps the most tidy letter she had ever written, the old lady roused up from the little doze in which she had been indulging, and bade Monica hasten, or she would lose the post.

"I have just finished, grannie," and as Monica laid down her pen, Harriet came to say that Richards was waiting for the letters.

"Have you any to send to-night, grannie? No? Then there is only this one, Harriet," and Monica breathed a sigh of relief as she shut up her writing-case and prepared to read to her grandmother.

Not the most agreeable of tasks was this; for Mrs. Beauchamp considered that it was "improving" for her granddaughter to read aloud for at least half an hour every evening. Monica was not a very fluent reader, so that she was continually being pulled up for leaving out commas, or for emphasising quite the wrong word. The interruptions would have been very trying if the book had been even the least bit interesting, but as it really seemed to have been chosen for its dryness and dullness, Monica did not mind. However, she tried her hardest, nowadays, to read carefully, and with a fair amount of expression, and she was far less often interrupted than she used to be. She did want to be what Marcus Drury called a "whatsoever" Christian.

"You really begin to read quite nicely, Monica," her grandmother said approvingly, as she finished a chapter, and was told that would do for that evening. "Your father would be greatly pleased with the improvement there has been in you lately."

Tears of joy sprang to Monica's eyes, as she put the book away, and then stooped and gave the old lady a "good-night" kiss.

"What has made the difference in you, Monica?"

And for the second time that day the young girl answered radiantly, but humbly, "The Lord Jesus Christ."

"Little Elsa said that was what it was," muttered Mrs. Beauchamp under her breath, as she toyed nervously with her eye-glasses. "Well, child, keep it up, it answers very well," she added, in a louder tone.

"It would be no use for me to try to keep myself, grannie dear," was the stammering reply, "for I should do something wrong directly, but when I let Jesus hold me tight, then it is all right."

Mrs. Beauchamp made no answer, and, after waiting a moment or two, Monica slipped off, fearful lest she had offended her grandmother.

But the old lady sat thinking deeply for a long, long time--thinking of the past when she was a girl of Monica's age, and with as headstrong a nature as hers--thinking of her married life, when her whole time and thought had been given to the things of this world--thinking of the unrestful, unsatisfying present, and of the dark, dark future stretching out beyond.

"Little Elsa told me, once, that she prayed God every day to bless me," she murmured, while a tear trickled slowly down her cheek. "God bless the child ... and me, too!"

A week elapsed before any reply came to Monica's letter, and she began to be afraid that Miss Buckingham would not make known her decision before it was too late, for the school reopened in another few days. However, one morning, the long-looked-for letter arrived, and the girl's heart was overjoyed when she found that her request had been granted, and that Lily Howell would be allowed to re-attend the school if she wrote an apology for her past conduct, and sent it to the head-mistress without delay. Miss Buckingham added that it had been a matter of regret with her, that one of her scholars should have had to leave the school under such circumstances, so that if Lily were really penitent, the past should be overlooked; more especially as the girl she had endeavoured to injure had taken upon herself the task of interceding for her.

"I wish she hadn't put that last bit in," mused Monica, "because that will very likely offend Lily more than ever, because she will hate to think she owes anything to me. However, I can't help that; I have done what seemed right, and I must just leave the result, and I am dreadfully afraid she won't apologise. Well, I'll do as grannie suggests--just send Miss Buckingham's letter to Mrs. Howell, and then wait to see what happens."

A little note, badly expressed and ill-spelt, but breathing gratitude in every line, from Mrs. Howell, was all that Monica received, and in it there was only a hope expressed that Lily would send the apology, but no certainty. So she had to be patient, and wait a little longer.

Meanwhile, she kept the matter quite secret, not even breathing a word of it to Olive, for she thought, and very wisely, that if the whole affair fell through, it would be much better for no one to have known anything of it. But Monica was not very clever at keeping a secret, and if she had seen much of the Franklyns the probability is, that in a moment of forgetfulness she would have divulged it. However, the girls met but seldom during the days that elapsed between Mrs. Franklyn's funeral and the school reopening.

Once, when Monica was in Osmington, she ran up against Amethyst Drury, and, as they were talking, Mr. Howell's motor car passed them, reminding the

younger girl of his daughter.

"I saw Lily the other day, Monica, and she wouldn't look at me. She walked by just as proud as Lucifer. The idea! As if we were all to blame, and she was innocent! I'm awfully glad she won't be at school any more."

"I daresay we should feel pretty much as she does, Thistle, if we were in her place," was Monica's reply; "she can't enjoy herself much."

"Quite as much as she deserves," said Amethyst, with decision; "horrid cheat!"

"Oh, Thistle!" Monica's tone was reproachful.

"Well, I ought not to have said that, I know," said Amethyst penitently, "but I *don't* like her; do you, Monica?"

"I am afraid I can't say I really like her," Monica confessed honestly; "but still she may be sorry inside, you know, and, perhaps, if we had been kinder to her at first, she would have been nicer to us now. I mean she would feel that we did not think the very worst of her," added Monica, a trifle lamely. She knew what she meant herself, but had difficulty in expressing it.

"I am afraid the worst is about right," was Amethyst's sententious answer, as they parted. And Monica could not help wondering just *what* the girls, as a whole, would say, if Lily should reappear at the High School again.

CHAPTER XXI.

"I GUESS I'LL JUST WATCH *YOU*A BIT."

"Monica!"

"Yes, grannie?"

"I want to talk to you for a few minutes."

And Monica, without so much as a frown, although she had just reached a most interesting part of her story, laid her book down, and prepared to give all her attention to her grandmother. She had no idea that Mrs. Beauchamp was covertly watching her, as she frequently did, to see whether she would exhibit any irritation or temper at the interruption; but if she had been aware of it, she could not have smiled more brightly, or been more ready to give up her own wishes to please her grandmother. Truly the Monica Beauchamp of the present was a totally different being from the one of bygone days.

The old lady noted her expression with an approving smile, and could not

help acknowledging to herself that this grandchild of hers was fast becoming very dear to her, and well deserved the pleasure that was in store for her.

"I wanted to have a little talk about your birthday, Monica; it will soon be here now."

"Yes, grannie," replied the girl, with sparkling eyes. "Next Tuesday, the 27th."

"And you will be sixteen. Dear me, how time flies, to be sure! I well remember the day your dear father was the same age," Mrs. Beauchamp said musingly, and her thoughts went back to past days for a few moments. But they soon returned to the present, and she went on: "I wonder what you would choose if I said you might have what you liked for a birthday present, Monica?" And she smiled into the eager, upturned face.

"Oh, grannie, I don't know, I'm sure, *what* I should choose; there are so many nice things!" And Monica turned over in her mind various things she had been wishing she possessed. Most people would have thought that she already had everything that she could possibly want, but even the best supplied of mortals can always do with "more." A nice writing-case, some books, a new brooch--any or all of these would be nice, and Monica was about to mention them, when a sudden thought flashed through her brain; here was the very opportunity she had been wanting! If only Mrs. Beauchamp would give her money this birthday to spend as she liked!

"Well, Monica, how long are you going to be choosing? Remember, I did not say I would give you what you chose!"

"Oh, grannie dear, I do hope you will!" coaxed Monica, in persuasive tones. "I would rather have it than anything else."

"Well, what is it? Perhaps if it is anything in reason, you might have it, but I warn you not to ask for a bicycle." Mrs. Beauchamp looked quite stern, as if the mere mention of the article brought the past vividly before her, but there was a suspicious twinkle in her eyes, which Monica did not notice.

"No, grannie, I will never ask you for *that*," was Monica's subdued reply, although her active young limbs literally ached sometimes, when she saw other girls jumping on their bicycles and spinning off along the country roads. But she had long since given up expecting ever to do the same, for she knew how her grandmother objected to women cyclists. "But I do wish you would give me money instead of any other present, this year, grannie, because I want some very particularly."

"What for?" asked the old lady curiously. "Surely you haven't exceeded your pocket-money, and got into debt like boys do; have you, Monica?"

"Oh! dear, no, grannie," and Monica's laugh rang merrily out, "it isn't anything of that kind! But if I tell you what I want it for, you won't say 'no,' will you, grannie dear? It's nothing wrong." And the clear grey eyes sought the old lady's

earnestly.

"Very well; now, tell me."

"Oh, you are a dear grannie!" said Monica enthusiastically. "I'll tell you all about it. You know when we girls all went to the missionary meeting at Sandyshore, Miss Daverel, the lady who spoke, said there were lots of ways girls could help; and we four made up our minds to see what we could do." Monica paused, and looked a trifle diffidently at Mrs. Beauchamp; she was not quite sure what sort of reception her words would get, for, as far as she knew, her grandmother had no more interest in foreign missions than old Richards, the coachman, had.

But the old lady nodded, and seemed in no wise annoyed, so Monica took courage, and proceeded with her story. "We want to have a sort of working-party, just amongst us girls, with perhaps Mrs. Drury and Miss Franklyn to help, and make all sorts of things to send out to China, for the poor little girls and the women who are so sad and unhappy, Miss Daverel says. She has promised to send us patterns and directions, and we want to begin very soon; but you see, grannie, we must have some money to buy dolls and print, and wool, and all sorts of things with. And I *thought*, grannie dear, if you would give me money instead of anything else, it would help us start, at any rate."

"H'm." Mrs. Beauchamp said nothing in favour of the proposal, but then she did not say anything against it, which was fairly encouraging. Monica tried to read her thoughts by scanning the face which was slightly turned away from her, but could make nothing of it. "Why should this undertaking be started with your money, Monica? Surely it is as much the others' affair as yours?"

"Oh, yes, we all want to do it; but you see, grannie, none of the others have much to spend, and I---- Oh, I do want to give something that I shall miss, if it is only a little!" And Monica's girlish face glowed with enthusiasm.

"Well, I had intended giving you something that I believe you would have liked very much, Monica; but if you would really rather have money to spend as you propose, you may count upon having a five-pound note on your birthday instead. I was going to give you a bicycle."

"Oh, grannie!" Amazement, consternation, hesitation, these, and countless other emotions played upon the young girl's heart. First, utter astonishment that her grandmother should ever have dreamt of revoking her decision about cycling; then a great desire for the long-coveted, and now possible machine took possession of her, and something within her said: "Here is the chance, at last, that you have been longing for. It is a pity you mentioned 'sacrifice,' but still, it does not matter, you have your choice, and your grandmother feels sure you will choose the bicycle, that is why she urges you to consider." Oh, how subtle was the temptation! Only those similarly constituted can imagine what a battle was being

fought in Monica's heart. The bicycle--or the five-pound note: an endless amount of pleasure for herself--or the means to provide joy for others. How hard it was! Monica felt that no other choice that she might ever be called upon to make could possibly equal this; for it was just the one thing she did want, and yet----

"Don't decide hastily, Monica," said her grandmother, seeing that she hesitated; "think it well over, and tell me to-morrow which you have chosen."

Monica was glad that it was nearly bedtime, for she longed to get away to her own room and think. Once there, she determined to fight the matter out, and a very sharp battle it proved, this first real denial of self. For some time, it seemed as if she *must* choose the bicycle, and satisfy her conscience by scraping together all the pocket-money she could muster (only a few shillings) and giving that to the missionary cause. She had not promised the girls a large amount, they knew nothing of the offer of the five pounds, and never need know. Her grandmother quite expected her to choose the bicycle, yes--she would decide upon that, and perhaps her father or some one else would give her a present of money, and if so, that should be added to the sum in her purse, and would provide quite a nice start for the working-party.

Monica began to feel quite self-sacrificing, and having, as she thought, made a final decision, she proceeded to prepare for bed, her mind full of the joy and pleasure that the possession of (and permission to use) a bicycle of her own would afford.

Her thoughts were still running in the same direction when she opened her little Bible and began to read a few verses, as she had done lately. She did not read according to any plan, she had never heard of such a thing as a Union for Bible Reading, so that she was just reading straight on through the gospels, and finding out many wonderful truths. She had read as far as Matt. xvi. 20 last time, and the little ribbon marker was laid between the pages. Her brain was still very full of the bicycle, and soon she found that she had read some few verses without having taken in the sense of them at all! So with an effort she sought to fix her wandering thoughts on the printed page, and as she did so, the words of the next verse seemed to stand out from it as if the letters were made of fire; at any rate they burnt right into her very soul.

"Then said Jesus unto His disciples, If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself."

Oh, how that one short sentence, straight from the lips of the Saviour, accused Monica! How guilty she felt! How small must be her love for Him, if she could, even for one short hour, think more of her own personal pleasure and gratification, than the needs of great, dark, heathen China! She fell on her knees beside the pretty white bed, and burying her face in her hands, she sobbed out her sorrow and humiliation into the ear of Him who never fails to hear His children's cry

for pardon. And as she prayed, a deep, sweet peace filled her heart, and she knew that she was forgiven. Thus Monica Beauchamp was enabled to triumph over self, and the first real sacrifice she had been called upon to make, since becoming a Christian, was willingly, nay, gladly made.

The next day, Mrs. Beauchamp, not without some misgiving (for she did not want Monica to fall short of her expectations, though she would hardly confess so much, even to herself), asked for her decision.

"I would like the five pounds best, please, grannie dear," was the bright reply, while a little flush rose to the young girl's face.

The old lady's heart thrilled with pleasure, but she evinced no sign of it.

"Very well, Monica," was all she said; and if her granddaughter had expected to be asked for her reasons, she would have been disappointed; but Monica was glad that no more was said. The experience of the night before was too real, too solemn, for her to talk it over, and she was too honest to have given any but her real reason.

With a glad heart, and a bright song often upon her lips, she prepared for school next day, and Mrs. Beauchamp, catching snatches of the refrain every now and then, marvelled at the total change that had taken place in her grandchild. "It is simply wonderful," she murmured, "wonderful! She used to be *such* an anxiety, and now she is just the reverse. I am glad for Conrad's sake; he will find a treasure when he returns, if this condition of things lasts." And the old lady sighed a wee bit doubtfully; but then she had no experimental knowledge of the Saviour who is "able to keep from falling," as well as "able to save."

The little governess cart was brought round from the stables punctually at nine o'clock the next morning, and Monica jumped into it, closely followed by Jack.

"No, no, poor Jack, you can't go with me to-day," she said, as she tried in vain to get him out of the trap; "I'm going to school, my doggie, and you can't go there."

Tom, the little stable-boy, who had been holding Cæsar's head, and grinning with delight at Jack's persistence, volunteered to carry him back and fasten him up in the yard.

"Poor old fellow," said his mistress, as Richards gathered up the reins, and the pony trotted briskly down the drive, for Jack's whines and short, yapping barks of disappointment could be heard for some distance.

"Pony's a bit fresh this morning, miss," remarked the old coachman, who had all his work cut out to hold him in, for the road to Osmington was a downhill one. "Steady there, steady," he said, as Cæsar tossed his dark-brown mane, resentful of some little flicks of the whip.

"A nasty-tempered h'animal 'e is sometimes; look how he bit your 'and,

miss."

"Oh, that was all my own fault, Richards," replied Monica; "I deserved that."

"Well, he didn't ought to have snapped out at you like that," continued the old man. "Belle and Beauty wouldn't have done such a thing, never," and he shook his grey head decisively, for "the pair" constituted the joy and pride of his heart, and he had never forgiven the introduction of the pony.

"They are always so quiet and gentle," agreed Monica, and the old coachman, having subdued Cæsar into going at a steady trot, rambled on about the merits of "the pair" until the short drive was over.

"I do *wonder* if Lily Howell will turn up," thought Monica to herself, as she entered the school door, greeting one and another as she passed them on her way to the cloak-room. There she found Amethyst Drury, who informed her that several of the girls had been moved up, but the quartette was still intact.

"And oh, Monica," she added, in an excited whisper, "Lily Howell must have come back! There is that pink and green hat of hers; no other girl would have one exactly like it, would she?"

Monica, glancing at the pegs, and seeing what was unmistakably one of Lily's well-known, gaudy hats, was not as astonished or disconcerted as Amethyst could have wished.

"I think there is no doubt about it, Thistle," she said quietly. "I shall be glad to find Lily has come back."

"Whatever for?" enquired the younger girl, in a puzzled tone. Monica had been incomprehensible to her lately.

But Monica was entering the hall by the swing-door, and only smiled her answer, for talking was forbidden. With one swift glance she saw that Lily, looking certainly less defiant than usual, was in her old place, and with a glad feeling in her heart, Monica slipped into her usual position at Olive's side, persistently ignoring the telegraphic messages that Olive's dark eyes were continually dispatching, until the head-mistress's bell announced the commencement of prayers.

Every one of the girls was more or less excited that first morning at school after the long holidays, but the air of the Fourth Form seemed charged with electricity. No one, except Monica and Lily, knew how it had come about that the latter was again amongst them; and even those two were wondering just what would happen, when Miss Buckingham appeared in the doorway.

"Good morning, girls. I am glad to meet you all once again," she said in the energetic, crisp fashion peculiar to her. "I hope you have all thoroughly enjoyed your holidays, and have now come back prepared to work hard. Some of you may be surprised to see one of your number here again, after what occurred last term; but when I tell you that she has apologised, and I have entirely consented to overlook what took place then, I am sure I may depend upon you, one and all, to

do your share in helping to blot out the memory of the past, and by your kindness and consideration, strive to emulate the Spirit of Him who said: 'Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.' I am not afraid that this unaccustomed leniency will be taken a mean advantage of, or I should warn you not to count upon a repetition of it. Instead of that, I advise you, one and all, to throw all your energies into this term's work, particularly those among you who will be candidates for the Junior Cambridge Examination at its close, and I shall look forward to seeing the majority of your names in the 'Honours' List."

The excitement caused by Miss Buckingham's words soon subsided, and beyond being the object of a good deal of staring, Lily Howell was not interfered with; and as the morning wore on, she began to feel less uncomfortable. It had been a hard tussle to get her to write the apology, and, but for her father threatening to send her to live indefinitely, with her strict aunt if she did not, she would have absolutely refused. But now that it was over, and the head-mistress had spoken so kindly, as even Lily could not help feeling, the girl began to see how despicable her conduct had been, and she was seized with a sudden desire to prove to the whole form that she could be as nice a girl as any of them, if she liked.

Fortunately, Maggie Masters, her former ally, was no longer at school, having left the neighbourhood, so that Lily had every opportunity of making a fresh start, and she took advantage of it. As the days passed, the change in her was very noticeable--even those who had always felt an aversion for her could no longer find any complaint to make; she was painstaking and persevering, and being by no means wanting in ability, she bade fair to rival the most clever in the class. But she kept aloof from the girls; she felt, instinctively, that in spite of Miss Buckingham's expressed wish, they were not willing to let bygones be bygones. They did not twit her, or indeed make any allusion to the past, but they simply let her alone.

All but Monica Beauchamp and Elsa Franklyn, who from the very first day of the term had tried their best to be friendly. But she repulsed them, feeling convinced that they were only patronising her; it was an impossibility for a nature like Lily Howell's to realise that both those girls were actuated by the same principle, that of "loving one another."

"I can't think what you did it for," she remarked to Monica, referring to the letter of intercession the latter had written on her behalf, "unless it was to make Miss Buckingham think a lot of you. Weren't you mad when she never even mentioned your name?" And the girl looked curiously at Monica, who was a complete enigma to her.

"Oh, Lily! I never once thought of such a thing," she replied, in a pained tone.

"Well, what *was* it for, then?" persisted Lily.

"I don't think you would understand if I told you," was the reply.

"Why not, pray? Ma said it was because you had turned religious lately. Is that why?" And Lily's light blue eyes scanned the other's face inquisitively.

"I have not turned 'religious' as you call it, Lily," said Monica gently, although a flush rose to her cheek; "I have only given myself to Jesus Christ, and I am trying to follow Him. I *do* wish you would, too, Lily," she added earnestly.

"My gracious goodness!" ejaculated Lily, inelegantly, for she was completely taken aback. "I guess I'll just watch *you* a bit, and see the effect before I go in for it."

Monica had to bite her lip hard to keep back the tears that would spring to her eyes, for she was tremendously in earnest, and Lily's mocking words jarred cruelly. "I am afraid you will see more failures than anything else," she said, in a low tone; "but you must not judge of Jesus Christ by me. He is the One to copy, He never fails or makes mistakes."

"Pa always says Christian people are far more often 'libels' than 'Bibles,' and that's why he doesn't believe in them," said Lily, to herself, as Monica and she separated; "but if I'm not mistaken, Miss Monica will prove an exception to that rule. All I know is, *I* wouldn't have done for *her*, what she did for *me*! So there must be something in it!"

CHAPTER XXII.

"I CANNOT SPARE YOU, MONICA."

Tuesday, September 27th, dawned bright and fair, as all birthdays should, and Monica, girl-like, was full of curiosity as to what presents she would have, beyond the one already promised.

Several inviting-looking packages were laid beside her plate on the breakfast table, and also some letters. Monica made a dash at them, hoping, not without a good deal of misgiving, that there would be one from her father.

"There is!" she exclaimed aloud, in her delight, just as Mrs. Beauchamp entered the dining-room, and greeted her with the old-time wish of "many happy returns," and bestowed upon her one of her rare kisses.

"What is there?" she queried, as she slipped a sealed envelope among the other presents, and took her seat at the head of the table.

"Why, actually a letter from dad, grannie, come on the very day," she ex-

plained, in glee, as she held it up. "And here is one from Miss Herschel, too, but she does not know when my birthday is, so that has only come by chance. Isn't that odd?"

"Very," agreed Mrs. Beauchamp, as she began to pour out the coffee. "Now eat your breakfast, and then you can look at your packages."

Either Monica's usually keen appetite was very small, or her digestion very good, on that particular morning, for in a very few minutes she expressed herself as "quite finished," and then began undoing strings and paper with eager fingers.

A dear little pocket Bible "with love from Amethyst and her mother"; a crudely drawn, but wonderfully life-like portrait of Jack, nicely framed, from Olive; a beautifully-worked nightdress-case from Elsa: both inexpensive gifts, for the twins had very little pocket-money. Then there was a very handsome collar for Jack, the united gift of the servants.

"I can't think who this is from," said Monica, taking up the last parcel and hastily cutting the string. "Oh, grannie, do look!" she cried, holding up a plain leather frame containing the photograph of Robina Herschel and her brother, taken together. In the frame was slipped a scrap of paper, bearing the words: "In memory of happy days at Sandyshore."

"Oh, I *am* glad to have that!" said Monica, as she gazed upon the pictured features of the two she admired so much, the fair, fragile girl presenting such a contrast to her firm, resolute brother. "I suppose it is in return for the snapshot which Marcus took, that I gave them. But how could they--I mean who could have told them when my birthday was?"

"Probably the letter will explain," suggested Mrs. Beauchamp, who was not quite sure that she approved of a *double* photograph. But a hasty glance at Monica's innocent face disarmed all suspicion.

It soon transpired that Elsa had been the little bird who had been only too ready to tell Miss Herschel when Monica's birthday was; and thus the mystery was quickly cleared up. Robina only wrote a short letter, as they were all very busy getting her brother's things ready for his voyage to Africa. He was to be dismissed, among other missionaries, at a public meeting in London in the course of a few days, and would start for the Soudan almost immediately after. "He sends you his best wishes, not only for your birthday, but for always," the letter concluded, "and says that you will find his good-bye message in Colossians i. 9, 10. We shall miss him terribly, mother and I, but we are quite, quite willing. Perhaps Mrs. Beauchamp would spare you to pay us a little visit after Christmas, while your holidays were on. Tell her, mother says we would take the greatest care of you!"

Monica read the last two sentences aloud, before she folded up the letter and put it in its envelope.

"It would be nice, grannie, wouldn't it? I hardly remember going away on a visit to any one."

"We must see," remarked Mrs. Beauchamp, in not very gushing tones. Strangely enough, the mere thought of parting with this granddaughter of hers, even for a week or two, filled her with dismay; she had grown to be dependent upon her for company, and the bright, cheery, girlish presence would be sadly missed at Carson Rise now.

And yet, Monica must go out into the world, and make friends and see many phases of life, of which she was utterly ignorant now. So she stifled a sigh, and added: "It is very kind of Mrs. Herschel to invite you, and it would make a nice little change for you, during the winter."

Monica, whose face had fallen somewhat at her grandmother's first remark, brightened up visibly. She *would* so like to go and stay with the Herschels, and she had been afraid Mrs. Beauchamp meant to refuse her consent, but now the prospect looked more hopeful.

"Two more letters and then I've done," she said gaily, opening the envelope bearing the old lady's handwriting first. Inside it was a crisp, new five-pound note, wrapped in a half-sheet of notepaper.

"Oh, thank you so much, grannie dear!" she said, as she fingered the rustling bit of paper which meant so much for the cause she had at heart: her imagination already pictured all sorts of nice things for China which that sum would procure.

"Are you not sorry now that you did not choose the bicycle?" said her grandmother drily.

"No, grannie, indeed I am not," was the bright response, for down in Monica's young heart was a deep sense of satisfaction that that battle with self had been fought and won the week before; for however much common sense may say to the contrary, the Bible axiom that "it is more blessed to give than to receive" still holds good.

"Now for dad's letter." With a hasty glance at the clock, which told her she had only a few minutes to spare, Monica tore open the thin envelope, and with eager fingers unfolded the closely written sheet. For a few seconds no words were spoken, and then she lifted her face, which was full of excitement and bubbling over with joy.

"Oh, grannie, he's coming home!" she cried; "something quite unexpected has changed all his plans, and instead of the regiment staying out in Simla, it's been ordered home, and when he gets to England, dad's going to retire. Oh, isn't it lovely! Just fancy, grannie, he won't go away from home any more, and he says he will then be able to look after his troublesome child himself, and relieve you of all responsibility. Naughty dad!" she added, while a little thrill of pleasure ran through her at the remembrance of the long letter sent from Sandyshore, which

would only just be arriving at Simla then. "I don't think I'm quite so much trouble now, am I, grannie? And I am sure you would miss me just a little bit, wouldn't you?"

She looked up roguishly, and was amazed to see her grandmother's eyes were looking suspiciously wet.

"I cannot spare you, Monica, I could not give you up now," she said tremulously; "your father must make his home here, as long as I live."

A sudden impulse prompted Monica to slip out of her place, and give her grandmother a caress, and a moment later they were locked in each other's arms: the first embrace the girl had ever received from the undemonstrative old lady. But it was only the forerunner of many more; the possibility of losing her grandchild had shown Mrs. Beauchamp how intensely she loved her, and the proud reserve of her nature tottered and fell before the flood of love which came rushing in.

"When does he speak of coming, Monica?" she asked, as she wiped her eyes, and felt if her dainty lace cap was on straight, while Monica returned to her letter.

"He doesn't quite know yet, grannie dear," she replied, glancing it quickly through, "but it might be in time for him to spend Christmas with us. Oh, isn't it almost too splendid, to think of seeing my darling dad quite two years sooner than I had ever dreamt, and then, not just for a little while, but for always!"

And Monica, gathering up all her packages, rushed upstairs to get ready for school in a perfect maze of delight.

She was already behind time, so that she could only put all her letters and presents into a half-empty drawer, to be admired more fully upon her return. But she just managed to look out Leslie Herschel's text, and some of the words, which she never remembered having seen before, fastened themselves upon her memory.

"We ... do not cease to pray for you, and desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of His will ... that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing."

"What a beautiful 'Good-bye' message," she murmured, as she closed her Bible, and began putting on her hat and coat. "I am sorry to think perhaps I shall never see him again, but I will try to become what he would wish, in case we should ever come across each other in years to come. Dear old dad would like the Herschels, I am sure."

The Franklyns and Amethyst were quite excited at Monica's news which she told them during recreation, until Olive remembered that Colonel Beauchamp's return to England *might* mean Monica leaving the neighbourhood and school, too; but she soon reassured them, feeling convinced that her father would fall in with her grandmother's wishes. Then she began talking about their work for China, and told them of the five pounds which Mrs. Beauchamp had given her,

and which was to be spent on materials. She did not think it necessary to mention that it was in lieu of any other present, and, curiously enough, it did not occur to the girls to ask what her grandmother's real birthday gift to her, personally, had been.

"We must have a committee meeting," said Olive importantly. She had made up her mind to enter heart and soul into the project, but her reason for doing so was very different from the others; she thought, poor child, that by working hard she would be able to drown the voice of conscience, which never rested, and was always accusing her. "I suppose we four will be the committee."

"Yes, if you like," Monica agreed, laughingly; all this was new ground to her. "Where shall we meet?"

"Mother says we can have my old playroom to use just as we like," piped Amethyst, "and we can have the working parties there, too."

"Lovely! Splendid! Just the place."

These, and other similar explanations greeted the proposal, which was unanimously accepted, and arrangements were quickly made for a committee on the following Saturday afternoon, to be followed by an expedition into the town to buy sufficient things to start the work with. Miss Daverel's instructions were expected to arrive at any time, Monica having written to her some days previously.

The bell rang before they had finished planning everything; but enough had been arranged for the time being, and the quartette went into school with very light hearts, and the lessons went well that day. Indeed, Miss Churchill had a model class that term, the greater number of her pupils being intent on doing both their teacher and themselves credit. Her only regret was that the girls would probably all do so well in the examinations that there would be a wholesale removal, and she would lose them all next term! Of Monica she had grown particularly fond. The story of her intercession on Lily Howell's behalf had, of course, become known to the teachers, though it had not been allowed to reach the ears of the girls, and Mary Churchill admired the spirit which had prompted such an action. There was a subtle change in Monica Beauchamp, too, an indefinable something which was rounding off the sharp corners of her disposition, and the teacher could not think what it was. Good and upright as Mary Churchill was, she was, as yet, a stranger to Him Who can make all the crooked places in the lives of His children straight, and the rough places smooth, or she would have recognised His handiwork.

However, she looked on and wondered, as day succeeded day, and the alteration not only lasted, but actually became intensified. Not that Monica became the least bit "goody-goody," even Olive could never say she was that; she was just as bright and laughter-loving as ever, and fond of every kind of fun that did no

one any harm. But her companions soon found that it was useless to get her to join in a joke, or laugh, carried out at some one else's expense, and nothing would persuade her to do behind a teacher's back what she would not do before her face!

Lily Howell, watching keenly, noted all these things, and being a quick-witted girl drew her own conclusions. Monica had not proved to be a "libel," and she felt constrained to admire the girl whom she used almost to hate.

Sometimes the remembrance that Lily was judging Christianity by its effect upon her daily life prevented Monica from doing, or saying something, in a moment's thoughtlessness, that would have brought discredit on her Master's cause. But far more often it was the realisation of His presence, unseen, but very real, which kept her from doing that which would grieve Him, for she had taken as her motto Leslie Herschel's text, "Walk worthy of the Lord, unto all pleasing."

Elsa Franklyn, who had been learning very hard lessons lately in the school of sorrow, was a great help to Monica. Indeed, when things went wrong Monica got into the way of telling Elsa all about it, and the quiet, gentle girl, who was so diffident of any attempt at advising the elder one, yet seemed, somehow, to straighten out the tangles in a wonderful way.

Olive, whose unrest made her captious and pettish at times, was sometimes inclined to be jealous of her twin-sister, and angry with Monica for "taking up" with Elsa, instead of being content with her alone, as used to be the case. But when she expostulated with Monica, as she did occasionally, the answer she invariably received, was, "I am just as fond of you as ever, Ollie, you know that quite well; but you see Elsa *understands*, and you don't *yet*; that's why I must have a talk with her sometimes."

And Olive, angry with herself for falling short of her friend's expectations, but not willing to take the same step as Monica and Elsa had done, felt that the explanation was even worse than the offence!

CHAPTER XXIII.

"IT'S ALL SURPRISES, NOWADAYS!"

"Now, let's get to business."

And the quartette, *alias* the "China Committee," as Amethyst had playfully nicknamed them, gathered round the large table in the vicarage playroom and began to consider ways and means.

"I've got a box full of patterns, and a long letter from Miss Daverel," began Monica, who had been elected president by virtue of her munificent gift towards the Expenses Fund, and who in consequence, occupied the "chair" at the head of the table. "Let us look at each thing, and I'll read to you how it's made, and then we'll decide whether we can undertake to make some like it, or not."

Half an hour was spent in admiring and examining the eighteen or twenty pretty and useful little "gifts," any, or all, of which, Miss Daverel said would be so acceptable to Chinese girls. Simply made children's clothing, a gaily dressed doll, bright knitted cuffs, a bookmarker, a woollen ball, a gay cretonne bag (containing a thimble, cotton, tiny pair of scissors and a pincushion), a knitted comforter, small Scripture pictures mounted on card--these were some of the articles the box contained.

"Most of them are quite easy to make," said Amethyst, who was keenly interested; "I should like to make a work-bag best, I think."

"I like dressing dolls," said Elsa, who was carefully examining the clothes of the sample she held in her hand.

"Oh, doll's clothes are awfully finicking to make!" was Olive's opinion; "but I think I could paste pictures on cards, like that. What shall you make, Monica?"

"I don't know, I'm sure. I am not much good at needlework. Perhaps I could knit a scarf, or some cuffs. But we must think about going to market first. Who will make a list of what we want?"

"I will." And Olive produced a pencil and paper with alacrity, and by dint of many references to Miss Daverel's directions, for quantities, a list of requisites sufficient to start with was eventually drawn up.

"Now about a working-party, Monica. When shall we begin, and whom shall we ask to join?"

It was unanimously decided that they would meet on Saturday afternoons, for a couple of hours, once a month to begin with, and every fortnight afterwards, if they got on well, and Mrs. Drury and Lois Franklyn were to be asked to take it in turns to superintend things. Several girls' names were proposed, and seconded, as suitable for invitation, and then Monica said she would like to ask Lily Howell.

"Oh, no!" cried Amethyst, in dismay; "we don't want her."

And Olive said: "I should think not, indeed!"

But Monica, who read approval in Elsa's glance, insisted that there was no reason why she should not join them, and realising that Monica was really the prime mover in the whole concern, the other two were reluctantly compelled to acquiesce; Amethyst comforting Olive and herself by remarking: "It's not the least bit likely that she will come, that's one good thing."

But contrary to Amethyst's expectations and wishes, she did. And thus it came to pass, on the following Saturday when the quartette, with very varying

feelings, were waiting the arrival of the half-dozen or so of their companions who had promised to come and help them, that Lily Howell was shown into the playroom, the first of any to put in an appearance.

Monica, suddenly overwhelmed with a terrible fit of shyness, shook hands stiffly, and could not think of a single thing to say. But Elsa came to the rescue, and soon interested Lily in the work they were going to do, showing and explaining one thing after another, until the newcomer caught the infection, and was very ready to do her share.

Indeed, that was the general opinion expressed Mrs. Drury, who, at the girls' earnest request, acted as spokeswoman, explained more fully the object of the little working-party, and with happy tact soon set everybody at their ease, having provided each one with exactly the piece of work which she had a fancy for doing.

For at least half an hour the tongues wagged busily, and many were the questions asked, for the work in most cases was quite novel; but eventually all were settled, and then Mrs. Drury read part of a book which Miss Daverel had suggested they should start with--"Children in Blue, and What They Do," one of the most delightful and fascinating books ever written with a view to interesting English girls in their Chinese sisters.

By the end of the afternoon every one of the girls had become quite as enthusiastic as even Monica could wish, and when the new missionary box had been handed round, it began to feel quite heavy.

"What are you going to do with all the things when we have made them?" asked one of the visitors, and Monica replied that they wanted to collect a nice number, and let Miss Daverel have them to take back with her when she returned to China, in about a year; and if they had more than were wanted for her, the missionary had sent the address of a depôt in London, where some ladies would gladly forward any gifts sent to them.

"Are you going to have a working party every Saturday?" Gipsy Monroe enquired, as they folded up their work. She was making a queer little cotton jacket, and was eager to go on with it.

"Only once a month, we thought," replied Monica; "we didn't suppose you would want to come oftener."

But every one insisted that they should meet every fortnight, at least; and so it was arranged.

"It *has* been nice, hasn't it?"

It was Amethyst who actually said the words, as they put away the work and cleared up the room after their visitors had gone, preparatory to going down to the dining-room for tea; but all the others were thinking the same thing. There were three very happy girls that evening, at any rate, out of the four.

Amethyst whispered to her mother, in that hour of confidences, when the light is waning outdoors, and the gas has not been lighted within, that she still meant to be a speaker when she grew up, but she was quite, quite sure now that it would have to be about missionary work, instead of temperance; would mumsie mind very much? And Mrs. Drury imprinted a kiss upon the upturned brow, and repressed an inclination to smile at the rapidity with which the alteration in subjects had been made, and said that she thought perhaps there would be plenty of opportunities for her to plead on behalf of both causes, if her little daughter ever became a "platform woman."

Olive slipped her arm through her twin-sister's, as they walked home in the dusk, and talked more frankly than she had done for a long time, and Elsa's heart grew light about her. She felt there was no end to what Olive could do, if once she started in the right direction, for she knew there were immense capabilities in her sister, such as she herself would never possess. And Elsa, who, ever since the meeting at Sandyshore, had had a great desire to become a missionary like Miss Daverel, when she grew up, but felt convinced that she would never be thought suitable, began to hope and pray that God would choose Olive instead. How splendid it would be if Olive, as well as Roger, should some day take the Gospel to the heathen!

Monica being rapidly driven home in the brougham which had been sent for her, reviewed the afternoon with girlish satisfaction. It was nice of the girls to come, nicer of them to be interested, and nicer still that they should be willing to meet more often than they had expected. But it was nicest of all to know (and the knowledge made her very humble) that she, Monica Beauchamp, was being enabled in a strength not her own, to walk along the pathway of life, in a way that was pleasing to her Master and helpful to others.

Mrs. Beauchamp was very interested in hearing all the details of the afternoon's work, and delighted Monica by offering to knit some comforters and cuffs during the long winter evenings that were coming. She would undertake to buy all the wool herself, she said, so that the "Expenses Fund" might last as long as possible.

"That's very kind, grannie," said Monica, with a smile, "for I can see our money will soon melt. We have spent nearly thirty shillings, already!"

"Out of your five pounds? Did none of the others contribute anything?" asked the old lady.

"Oh, yes, seven or eight shillings between them, grannie. But they could not do more: Amethyst has very little pocket-money, I know, and I think the Franklyns are quite poor." Monica dropped her voice to a whisper. Not even to her grandmother could she explain her reasons for thinking so; but first, the barely furnished rooms at the doctor's, and then the very, very simple and inexpensive

mourning which was all that could be afforded for the grown-up daughters, as well as for the younger children, told their own tale, which Monica, brought up as she had been in the lap of luxury, thought the essence of poverty.

"The doctor's practice is not so large as his family," remarked Mrs. Beauchamp, with grim humour. "When is Elsa's birthday, Monica?" she added, after a short pause.

The girl, who had been thinking deeply, started at the sudden and apparently irrelevant question.

"Why, next Saturday, grannie, the same day as Olive's, of course." What could have made her grandmother ask?

Probably she looked her surprise, for the old lady said: "You need not be afraid I am going to give them five-pound notes to squander on heathen Chinese," but her smile belied her words. "I was wondering how much younger they are than you."

"Just over a year: they will be fifteen on their birthday. It will be a very sad day for them; Olive says Elsa can't bear to think of a birthday without their mother."

"Poor children," said Mrs. Beauchamp, in tones of pity; then, as if to change the subject, she said: "I suppose Amethyst Drury is younger again?"

"Oh, yes, she won't be fifteen until next summer, only she is so quick and clever that she is quite as forward at school as those who are older. I am much the oldest in our form," added Monica, with a sigh. Her backwardness in many subjects had been a source of trouble to her lately.

"I expect you will know enough by the time you leave school, my dear, if you make the most of the next two years," said her grandmother kindly. "I have no fancy for you to become a blue-stocking."

"I am afraid there is no fear of that, grannie!" and Monica laughed merrily. "I am far too big a dunce. Little Thistle will do the best of us all, I expect, but Elsa and Olive have to work hard, because they must earn their living when they leave school. Olive wants to go in for art, she says; and she is so clever at drawing I expect she will get on."

"H'm! it's a pity she hasn't a fancy for cooking or washing," said the old lady bluntly; "either of those occupations would be more likely to provide her with food and clothing than dabbling about with messy paints. I expect my little Elsa is far more sensible, and means to be a home-bird."

"No, grannie, she will have to do something; for Miss Franklyn can manage all the housekeeping. I *think* Elsa hopes some day that she might be a nurse in a children's hospital, but she has not said anything about it lately."

"Sensible girl. Now get the book, Monica, and we will have some reading."

It was not until the twins' birthday that Monica realised what all her grand-

mother's questions were aiming at, and then she understood!

"What time do the girls come, Monica," asked Mrs. Beauchamp, as they sat longer than usual over their breakfast, there being no need to hurry, for Saturday was a whole holiday.

Monica looked up in surprise, for it had been all arranged before that the Franklyns should come at eleven, and remain the whole day at Carson Rise, in order that their birthday might not be spent among surroundings which would remind them continually of their loss. Amethyst Drury had been invited, too.

"At eleven, granny."

"Oh, yes, of course. How are you going to amuse yourselves, Monica?"

"I don't know, I'm sure, grannie; we might get a game of croquet-golf, or tennis, if the grass is dry enough." And Monica looked critically out upon the beautiful lawn, which was the pride of the gardener's heart.

"I have secured a new 'amusement' for you," said Mrs. Beauchamp, her eyes twinkling with fun. "I was going to say 'game,' but it is hardly that."

"What can it be? Not badminton?" queried Monica, all excitement.

"No, not badminton," repeated her grandmother, with a smile. "I hardly think you will guess, so as soon as you have finished breakfast we will go and see it."

"I finished ages ago," said Monica, as she pushed back her chair with alacrity; "I am curious, grannie." And she slipped her arm through the old lady's (a favourite habit nowadays), and they went together to a large summer-house where the croquet and tennis sets were kept.

"Is it a small game, or whatever you call it, grannie?"

"Not very small," was the amused reply, "but here we are, and you can judge for yourself."

She fitted a key in the lock, and opened the door, and Monica gazed in utter astonishment at what she saw; for, resting on its own stand in the middle of the quaint, octagonal summer-house, was a beautiful, perfectly new bicycle!

[image]

"MONICA GAZED IN UTTER ASTONISHMENT."

"Oh, grannie!" Only an exclamation, but who can describe all that was contained in those two words? and Monica almost squeezed the breath out of the old lady's body with the energy with which she hugged her.

"There, there, that will do, Monica; don't quite strangle me," protested Mrs. Beauchamp; but all the same, she keenly enjoyed her grandchild's unqualified

delight. "Do you like it?" she added, as Monica examined and admired the bicycle to her heart's content.

"I can't *think* why you have given it to me, grannie!" was the answer, if answer it could be called.

And Mrs. Beauchamp said she would find the reason inside the little basket fastened to the handle-bars.

The old lady turned away, and pretended to look out of one of the little coloured glass windows, while Monica read the few words on a tiny card which she found:--

"For an unselfish girl,
from her loving
GRANNIE."

A lump rose in Monica's throat as she stepped across the little summer-house and bent down and kissed the face which only a few short months ago she had thought so stern and unlovable. *How* different everything was nowadays!

"I didn't do it for a reward, grannie dear," she whispered. "I never dreamt of such a thing. I *quite* gave up all thought of the bicycle when I chose the five pounds."

"I know you did, my child," replied the old lady, while she furtively wiped her eyes, which were suspiciously moist, although she was smiling now; "but you see, *I* didn't! And as I knew nothing about these things, I took Mr. Bertram into my confidence, and told him to choose just the right kind and size; and I should think he has done his work very well. Now you will have something to amuse your friends with, to-day."

"We shall have to take great care not to knock it about," said Monica.

"Ah! that reminds me: Mr. Bertram advised your learning to ride on an old one first, so I have ordered Brown's to send a man over with one from Osmington this morning, and if you like to spend a little time in having a lesson, he can stay. I daresay the girls would find it amusing."

"To see me tumble off, grannie?" cried Monica merrily.

"Well, don't hurt your ankle again, or anything else," cautioned her grandmother; "I should prefer to hand you over whole to your father when he comes."

The next hour passed quickly, and then the Franklyns and Amethyst arrived.

Monica, all excitement, took them straight to the summer-house, not noticing, in her eagerness, that her friends seemed quite as excited as herself. But they no sooner saw the bicycle than Olive, who could contain herself no longer, exclaimed: "It's *exactly* the same!" and then it was Monica's turn to look puzzled.

However, the mystery was soon cleared up, as she learnt that there had been a great surprise at the doctor's that morning, too; a bicycle, the exact counterpart of Monica's, having been delivered there addressed to, "The Misses Elsa and Olive Franklyn"; and a little note attached to it stated that it was a birthday gift to the twins, with love and best wishes from Mrs. Beauchamp.

"How splendid of grannie!" cried Monica enthusiastically; "now we shall have some lovely rides together."

"Won't it be jolly?" said Olive, who was beside herself with pleasure, and Elsa's quietly happy face was good to see.

"Poor Thistle, you are the only one left out! Never mind, you shall use mine sometimes," Monica said, suddenly remembering that this new departure would make Amethyst feel rather out of it.

She was delighted when Amethyst replied with glee: "But I am going to have one of my own very soon. Father promised me he would get me one this autumn, and he said the other day he had seen one which was just what he liked, only a little too big for me, so he has ordered a smaller-sized one. I meant to have given you *such* a surprise."

"I think it's all surprises nowadays," said Monica; "how little any of us dreamt last half-term holiday that we should all be riding our own bicycles before the next one arrived!"

"We wanted to bring ours up to show you," put in Elsa, "but Mrs. Beauchamp, in her note, asked us not to. We were dreadfully afraid that perhaps she didn't want you to know, Monica. But that isn't like her, and it wouldn't have been any pleasure if we couldn't tell you."

"I should think not! Dear old grannie, I can guess why she said that. A man from Osmington is coming up this morning to give us some lessons on an old one. Why, there he is, and grannie too!"

All four girls crossed the lawn, and while the twins were trying in vain to express to Mrs. Beauchamp the delight that her handsome present had given them, Monica and Amethyst spoke to the man, and inspected the bicycle he had brought, and which Jack was sniffing suspiciously.

The greater part of the day, first with the teacher, and afterwards with only each other to hold the machine up, was spent on the wide, straight drive, which was a charming place to practise upon. And if the quartette were *all* quite tired out as they bade each other "good-bye," they were all agreed that it was well worth

it, to be able to balance themselves and even go a few yards without assistance!

CHAPTER XXIV.

"I THINK MY MONICA DESERVES THE V.C."

The autumn term sped swiftly away. In addition to the school work, which required a great deal of persevering effort to do as well as the quartette aimed at doing theirs that term, Elsa had her music, and Olive attended a school of art for extra lessons in drawing and sepia.

Amethyst, who, as yet, evinced no great talent for any accomplishments, so-called, had a little more spare time than the others, and was therefore able to go occasionally with her mother to visit some of her poor old, or invalid, folk. These visits were a great interest to Amethyst, who had a kind and pitying little heart for sorrow and suffering, and Mrs. Drury wisely encouraged her little daughter to sing, or repeat a few comforting texts to the sad, or lonely, or suffering, as the case might be. Poor old Mrs. Robbins had long since gone to the "City bright" of which Amethyst had sung to her; but in the crowded and squalid streets of the poorer part of St. Paul's parish there were many more who needed temporal as well as spiritual help.

Once, Mrs. Drury took her with her to see Mrs. Hodges, whose cottage was on the Disbrowe estate, and as Amethyst entered the little garden gate, the only occasion on which she had ever been there before recurred vividly to her mind.

"I wonder whether that little old woman is still here, mumsie," she said.

"Hardly likely, dear, but you will soon hear."

It transpired that Granny Wood was there, circumstances having caused her to make her home with her daughter, and the dear old soul, now quite a prisoner through rheumatism to her chair by the fireside, was delighted to see one of the "little missies," of whom, as her daughter explained, she was never tired of talking.

"They was angels without wings to me, that day, ma'am," the old granny asserted; "little missy here, and her friend. But them other two--well, there, I won't say all I thinks! My darter says I ain't no business to bear malice, an' me a Christian body, but I owes this last illness o' mine to that there bouncin' h'animal." And the wrinkled old face looked as nearly cross as it was possible for her apple-cheeks and faded blue eyes to manage.

Amethyst looked subdued, and Mrs. Drury hastened to explain that she was

sure the girls had not meant to be really unkind, and that both of them had learnt since what suffering meant, and she went on to tell of the death of Olive's mother.

"Dear, dear; poor lamb!" ejaculated Granny Wood, commiseratingly, all her animosity gone; "to think o' that now, and me a-grumblin' at 'er an' all."

"And Monica Beauchamp, the other one, you know," put in Amethyst, "she is quite different now. She tries to be kind to everybody, because Jesus was always kind."

"Praise the Lord, missy," cried the old woman, in quavering tones; "then I'll never say aught agin' either of 'em again; but I'll just keep on asking the Almighty to bless every one of you, and make you all blessings every day of your lives."

Amethyst and her mother walked home rather silently, until they reached the spot where the bicycle accident had happened that memorable afternoon.

"It must have been just here," said the little girl, as they passed the place. "I remember Olive saying the motor was pulled up by that tree. It was a good thing Mr. Howell went by just then, wasn't it, mumsie?"

"Yes, dear," agreed Mrs. Drury.

"*Such* a lot has happened since then," continued Amethyst, who was in a retrospective mood. "Everything seemed to begin with that half-term holiday."

"What do you mean, girlie?"

"Why, mumsie, Mrs. Beauchamp used to be so cross, and now she's the nicest old dear possible; and Monica was nasty and uppish, you know, at first. I didn't think I ever *could* like her, and now I think she's almost too good to live, sometimes! And Olive is nicer too, although I shall always like my darling Elsa best." Here Amethyst paused, from sheer want of breath, for her tongue always ran twice as quickly as other people's.

"Is that all, girlie?" put in Mrs. Drury, who was much amused at the comparisons, but felt they were truthfully if somewhat quaintly made.

"Oh, no! There's Lily Howell, just *think* how she's altered. I don't believe any one would know her nowadays who knew her then; she's so well behaved, and speaks quietly, and seldom gets into trouble at school. I'm so glad Mrs. Howell buys plain hats and things for her now," Amethyst ran on. "I don't believe she could help being vulgar when she wore such hideously gaudy hats and dresses."

"What has Lily's clothing to do with the bicycle accident? You have wandered a long way from that," remarked her mother, with a smile.

"Oh, mumsie, I haven't! It's just because Lily wants to copy everything Monica does now, that she is so much more lady-like. I think she nearly worships Monica."

"Hush, Amethyst! Don't speak like that, dear," reproved her mother; "I can quite understand that Lily feels she owes a good deal to her. I hope that she will one day be a star in Monica's crown. I am so glad that they have begun to attend

St. Paul's."

"Mrs. Howell and Lily were both at church twice last Sunday, mumsie, and Mr. Howell was there in the evening. I remember noticing him, because I did think father must have chosen his text on purpose for him, only of course he didn't, because he couldn't possibly have known he would be there."

And Mrs. Drury, who had vivid recollections of the intense earnestness with which her husband had preached from Mark viii. 36, on the subject of Eternal Profit and Loss, said, softly, as they turned in at the Vicarage gates: "Father always asks God to give him the right text to preach from, girlie, and *He* knew just who would be hearing the sermon."

Shrewd little Amethyst had been fairly correct in her rough-and-ready epitome of the happenings of the last six months, which had certainly left their mark on all concerned, and, in every case, for the better, to a greater or smaller degree.

The missionary working-party prospered and increased, and, by the time Christmas drew near, the number of members had risen to fourteen; quite a large drawer full of "gifts" had been already neatly and carefully made, and the Expenses Fund was almost exhausted! The committee began to consider how it was to be replenished, and hazy ideas of "collecting" (which they dreaded) or else having a little sale of work during the Christmas holidays, formed in their enthusiastic minds.

But they were still only ideas, when, one Saturday afternoon, Lily Howell, who, upon one pretext or another, had waited until all but the quartette had gone, slipped a sealed envelope into Monica's hand, and merely whispering: "Pa told me to give it to you," was gone before the astonished girl could say a word.

The excitement of the committee when they found that the envelope contained a cheque for £10, "To be used for your Chinese folks, and ask for more when you want it," was tremendous.

"How splendid! Now we sha'n't have either to beg, borrow, or steal," cried Olive. "It is a good thing we let Lily come, after all."

And Monica, who remembered the opposition which she had met with upon proposing Lily's name, could not refrain from smiling.

Those were happy days for Monica: her school life was most interesting, and now that she bicycled into Osmington, instead of being dependent upon the pony-trap, she enjoyed the ride to and fro immensely, especially as either one or two of her friends accompanied her most of the way to Carson Rise, on the days that she remained at school until the afternoon, for music or some other extra.

Then the missionary work was a source of great pleasure to her, and her enthusiasm was kept very keen by long letters from Robina Herschel, and an occasional one from Miss Daverel.

Sometimes, when Monica was poring over a missionary magazine, or ex-

ercising her ingenuity in making something fresh for the girls to copy at the working-party, her grandmother would tease her by saying she was "missionary mad." But Monica would only look up and smile, knowing that in her heart of hearts the old lady was well-content that her grandchild should seek to help forward, even in the simplest way, the spread of the "good news," which had brought light at eventide to her own dark heart.

And every day was bringing Colonel Beauchamp nearer. Several letters had come from him, but in none of them had he been able, definitely, to say when he would reach England; he hoped, as he had said at first, to spend Christmas Day at home, but it was uncertain. Monica was counting the days, in true school-girl fashion, by marking off on a little calendar each day at its close; and the number had steadily decreased until very few remained to be crossed off now.

She stood before the little calendar on the bedroom wall one night, pencil in hand, and crossed off the twenty-first of December. "Only four more days to Christmas now, and by then, my darling dad will be here. Oh, how I am longing to see him, and tell him everything! I have tried to explain in my letters, but it is so difficult to write just what one feels, and I *do* want to feel his hand on my head once more, just as he used to do, and hear his dear voice saying, 'God bless my darling child.'"

Here Monica's feelings overcame her, and her eyes brimmed with tears for a moment. But they were soon chased away, and a happy smile played about her lips, as she began to undress, and put the various articles of her attire neatly away. "I do hope he will think I have improved, and that I am growing up a little bit like he wanted me to. If I am, it is all owing to the Herschels," and Monica took up the frame containing the pictured faces of her seaside friends, and gazed thoughtfully at them. "Dear Robina, and--and Leslie, too; what sort of girl should I have been by now, if God had not sent you into my life? I can never, never thank Him enough for all His goodness to me, and so the only thing I can do is to seek to 'walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing,' as my motto says, and do what I can to get others to follow Him, too."

Monica never crossed off December the twenty-second on her little calendar; indeed, she forgot all about it, for a telegram the next afternoon informed them that the colonel had already left London, and in less than a couple of hours Monica was in her father's arms.

"My darling child!"

"Dearest dad!"

What else they said was unintelligible for the next few moments, and then Colonel Beauchamp held his daughter at arm's length, and critically examined her.

"Shall I pass muster, daddy dear?" she asked, merrily; but there was more

behind the words than appeared on the surface.

And the proud father, noting the purposeful face, so full of expression, and reading true nobility of character therein, held out his arms, and Monica slipped confidingly into them, while he bent his soldierly head and pressed a long, long kiss upon her broad white brow, murmuring, as he did so, in tones so low as only to reach his daughter's ears: "I think my Monica deserves the V.C., for it is evident she has fought successfully against heavy odds, under fire of the enemy, and won a brilliant victory."

"Oh, dad, I don't think I have," whispered the happy girl, her head on his shoulder; "but whatever good there is about me, is all owing to my having enlisted under the banner of Jesus Christ."

"His arm hath gotten him the victory," repeated the colonel reverently, and Monica knew that her father understood.

CHAPTER XXV

"THE CHILD HAS CHOSEN WELL."

Our story is done. With the retirement of her son from the army, and his return to England, and subsequent settling down at Carson Rise, Mrs. Beauchamp's responsibility over her once troublesome granddaughter ceased. But to those readers who have been interested in the quartette, during a few months of their school life, a glimpse at them all, seven years after the events recorded, will not come amiss.

Olive Franklyn, having excelled in various drawing examinations, was fortunate in securing an exhibition which admitted her, at a nominal fee, as student at a much-sought-after School of Art for a couple of years upon leaving the High School. From thence, she went over to Paris, in order to perfect herself in her particular branch of art, and so talented are her sketches that already there seems a brilliant future stretching out before her. She has made many friends among her fellow students, for Olive Franklyn is not only a clever artist, but a congenial companion as well. But in her inmost heart, she feels that no one will ever take Monica's place. They are friends still, although for several years they have only met occasionally; but they have very little in common, for Olive has not yet surrendered to the King of kings, although Monica and Elsa have faith enough to believe that she will do so, sooner or later. She says she never intends to marry,

for she is wedded already to her art, and that suffices her.

Elsa has been able to carry out her girlish ambition, and for the last two years has been a nurse in the children's ward of a large London hospital. Her heart, brimming over with love for the pitiful specimens of humanity entrusted to her care, has found an outlet in tending the little ones, for as each newcomer arrives she seems to hear the Divine commission, "Take this child, and nurse it *for Me*." She is beloved by all the staff for her gentle, helpful ways, and her influence over the little inmates of the cots in her ward is marvellous. Seldom indeed does a child remain refractory after Nurse Franklyn has spoken a few words to it, in her soft girlish tones; and the Sister persists in saying that even the tiniest baby knows when it is in her arms, and leaves off crying instantly! But it was not merely for the sake of helping to alleviate pain that Elsa made choice of hospital nursing as a profession. That is a noble work; but it is a nobler still when the sad and suffering hearts of even little children are pointed to the tender Shepherd who said: "Suffer the little children to come unto Me." And that was Elsa's aim in all her work, and many were the young lives won for her Master in that large children's ward. She is hoping, some day, to become Sister of her ward if all goes well, and not one of her fellow-nurses would grudge her the honour; but the Rev. Marcus Drury, senior curate of Monkrigg, has other views for her, and, possibly, when he obtains a living, Nurse Franklyn will be persuaded to say "good-bye" to her bairnies; and if so, there will be much wailing and many regrets.

Amethyst Drury has not developed into a "platform woman" yet; but one cannot tell what the future has in store for her, as she has only lately celebrated her twenty-first birthday. She has improved wonderfully since her school-days, and is her mother's right hand in the parish, while Miss Drury's Bible Class for girls just too old for Sunday School, but not yet "young women," is remarkably well-attended. She has a very pretty, clear soprano voice, and is much in request at various choral classes and concerts, and in that way has commenced platform work. And as Amethyst long ago, in the words of Miss Havergal's hymn had said,

> Take my voice, and let me sing
> Always, only, for my King,

her mother and father feel that she is speaking for Him, in words of sacred song, just as clearly, and sometimes far more tellingly, than she could ever hope to do as a lecturer.

The Drurys are still at Osmington, and Amethyst carries on the missionary working party begun so many years ago in the old playroom. Not one of the original members is still on the spot except her, but the younger sisters of some of those girls have taken their places, Joan Franklyn, who will soon be leaving school,

being the oldest member. A very special interest is attached to the work this year, for it is all destined for the mission station in China, where Lily Howell has been working with an older missionary (none other than Hope Daverel herself!) for some few months. Little did any of the quartette dream, when two of them so reluctantly admitted her to their working-party, that she would become their "first-fruits." But it seems that Monica's disinterested action on Lily's behalf, and subsequent Christlike life, influenced the girl who was keenly criticising all her actions, with the result that she became an earnest Christian, while a great desire took root in her heart to go to the poor Chinese and tell them of the Saviour she had found. At first, her father was unwilling, and Lily felt she would have to give up her cherished desire; but eventually all hindrances were removed, and after training she went out as an honorary missionary to inland China.

But what of Monica? Well, Monica Beauchamp is Monica Herschel now, and so, at last, she has a sister of her own in Robina, whom she dearly loves. Life has not been all unclouded sunshine to Monica, for, soon after her engagement to Leslie Herschel, who was home on furlough, he became seriously ill with African fever, and for days his life hung in the balance. But God was with her through it all, and her faith, which never wavered, was eventually rewarded by the giving back to her of the one whom she had always enshrined in her heart, as her ideal, because it was he who had been the means of her salvation.

Leslie's serious illness put an end to their hopes of working side by side for Christ in the Soudan, for the time being, at any rate; but they still look forward to it, in the future, if God so wills it. Meanwhile, they are very happy in their work for Him at West Port, a large seafaring town, where Leslie is acting as curate-in-charge for an elderly and infirm vicar. The work is arduous, for the fisher-folk at West Port are hardly less heathen than the natives of Africa, but the seed is being faithfully sown there, and already a harvest of precious souls is being reaped.

"Parson's lady" is a great favourite among the women, to whom Monica devotes all her energies, and not a few among them will one day "rise up and call her blessed," for from her lips and life they have learnt the way into the Kingdom.

Perhaps the daily teaching, and oftentimes tending, of these poor ignorant fisherwomen, was not just the career that Colonel Beauchamp would have chosen for his handsome daughter; and when he gave his consent to her marriage with Leslie Herschel such a future for her was an undreamt-of thing.

But who could resist her pleading tones and soft caress, when, with cheeks like damask roses, she whispered, "Oh, dad, I love him! I think I always have, since the old Sandyshore days. There never *could* be any one but Leslie for me, and he says just the same!" So her fond father, remembering the sadness of his own short married life, confessed that he was conquered.

"She might have married anybody, with her face and fortune," demurred

Mrs. Beauchamp, who was very little altered, outwardly, despite her seventy-six years; "but she always would have her own way."

"Well, I must say I think the child has chosen well," said the colonel. "Leslie is a man in a thousand, and worthy even of our dearest Monica."

"Perhaps, as he was the means of my losing the troublesome part of my granddaughter seven years ago, he has the best right to have her altogether," murmured the old lady, more to herself than to her son, and she fell into a reverie, and lived over again the days that are no more.

THE END.

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